

WALKING IN THE GRASS SEA
AND OTHER STORIES

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WALKING IN THE GRASS SEA

Page One (Nine panels.)

Pic 1 A close-up view of a man's face, pale, white, and old.

PROFESSOR: The stone cities lay by the wine seas. Continents of the black sun were laid
 upon the body of the basilisk. Moth people burnt in dreams.
 Owl people hunted the burnt cinders of moths . . .

STUDENT (v. o.): Professor?

Pic 2 The Professor is in a lectern. There are several students before him in their chairs. He is at the front of the class.

PROFESSOR: Pardon?

STUDENT: You seemed lost in thought.

PROFESSOR: Ah, yes, well, at my age it's hard to tell what you remember and what you
 imagine. Back to our lessons then . . . Pollock's Conjecture is . . .

Pic 3 The Professor is alone in his classroom. The sun is setting through a window to his left, while the reader sees him face on, so the sun is coming through seemingly from the right.

PROFESSOR: *In the garden, there strayed
 a beautiful maid,
 as fair as the flowers
 of the morn;
 the first hour of her life
 she was a man's wife,
 and was buried before
 she was born.*
 Why am I reminded of that just now?

Pic 4 Suddenly sun's light becomes a deep blue, with the Professor turning to see it as it comes.

PROFESSOR: What is happening outside?

Pic 5 A flash of blue light.

Pic 6 The classroom is empty.

Pic 7 The Professor finds himself in a vast desert. He seems alone. He hears something below ground.

Pic 8 He starts to dig into the sand, the reader sees him from above, as in the small pit he made

he finds something.

Pic 9 He staggers back. In the pit are small worms crawling with two small blue pits of eyes. They are longer than maggots but not by much and there seems to be a labyrinth under the desert. As he staggers back, a blue figure approaches behind him.

Page Two (Nine panels.)

Pic 1 The Professor can see the figure now and has stood up, confronting him.

PROFESSOR: Where am I? What are you?

GATE: I am what I have always been. Tell me, what do you think of the creatures?

PROFESSOR: Those maggots? I haven't thought of them.

GATE: Nor they of you. But peer closer. Tell me, what you see.

Pic 2 The Professor can be seen from above, looking down into the pit again. The small worms are still crawling but there is something strange about them.

PROFESSOR: I see nothing. Now, where am I? You didn't answer me.

GATE (v. o.): Don't you recognize the familiar shores of home?

PROFESSOR: Am I dreaming? Is any of this real?

GATE (v. o.): As real as life allows.

Pic 3 Professor is standing before the figure, confronting him.

PROFESSOR: I don't know what you want. (He pauses,) wait? My **home**? This is not Earth.

GATE: It is. It is approximately one hundred million years after your time. Look below. See what becomes of humanity.

PROFESSOR: Those **things** are not human.

GATE: Nor are you a bacterium. But the slender step from one to the other is simply a matter of time.

PROFESSOR: What are you? A god? Devil? And you haven't entirely convinced me this is not a dream.

Pic 4 Continuation of pic 3.

GATE: Existence is a dream, a dreamless sleep suspended upon two edges of an eternity. Before you awoke into being you were nothing. After the final sleep, you may become nothing, save the boundaries we allow. As for gods or devils, we are beyond either definition. You may consider us gates, between all things, through all things.

PROFESSOR: Gates which lead where pray tell?

GATE: Gates which lead back to what was, or forward to what will be.

Pic 5 Close-up of the Professor.

PROFESSOR: If you are so powerful, what need have you of me?

GATE: You are a seed. We are harvesters. We have seen you describe fragments of a time outside your ken, and knowing this, realize the only way you could know is if you had seen certain centuries before your awareness of them. Therefore, we bring you here, and elsewhere, provide moments of clarity in a sea of shadow, and then return you as you were, half-remembering and half-forgetting, leading exactly to the future you described.

Pic 6 The Professor's face sinks as he grasps the meaning of these words.

PROFESSOR: You are going to throw me into the future and make me experience all this because I **spoke** of such a future accidentally?

GATE: What makes you believe it was accidental? Come now, and see what you were destined to perceive.

Pic 7 The desert is now empty.

Pic 8 Close-up of the worms crawling through the labyrinths below.

Pic 9 Close-up of a single worm, her eyes blue, almost human-like, yet also somewhat owl-like as well.

Page Three (Nine Panels.)

Pic 1 Another desert, but now golden, and littered upon it golden spires. People there are also golden, men and women walking the broad causeways and roads.

GATE (v. o.): Behold Yara.

Pic 2 A frozen world of blue and silver. Again spires, but some broken, and the people thereof

silver, with eyes of blue.

GATE (v. o.): And its mirror-sister Yaira.

Pic 3 The golden people can be seen in strangely runic armour, blue and grey, and banners hang from their lances, and they ride upon great black spiders, each as large as an elephant. The silver people can be seen in strangely golden armour, riding into battle atop spiders of scarlet, both armies upon the plains of a strangely golden and silver landscape.

GATE: This was their final battle. This was the moment of their perishing.

Pic 4 The Professor and Gate stand in a darkened ancient gallery of the city, the sculptures and images of their history. There were people gathered about, celebrating, or people dancing, or people making love. But little else.

PROFESSOR: Where are we?

GATE: The city of Jatowan during the last days, or just before. The battle will be fought soon.

PROFESSOR: And after the battle?

GATE: An end. A cessation.

PROFESSOR: I remember this more clearly now. The carved lusting gods, the tragedies in stone. How can I remember something I hadn't done till now?

Pic 5 Continuation of Pic 4

GATE: Time is not a river, it is a labyrinth, and ourselves but beasts moving through one passage or another, pieces of ourselves scattered forward or back. All that matters is that the pieces are arranged close enough that one does not go mad feeling the empty places between.

Pic 6 The Professor stops before a young child in the gallery as the dim twilight of the bronze windows makes the world half in shadow. The child stares up at him, and there is nothing in her gaze, no happiness, nor misery, just a slight smile, an idiotic almost-grin.

PROFESSOR: What is wrong with her?

GATE: She is as much in a future time as you are. Those worms in the labyrinth, did you think they too only occupied a slight piece of ground?

Pic 7 The soldiers are all dead, all broken and bloodied, their blood a mixture of silver and gold. The spiders are all perished as well, some broken on spires of stone.

Pic 8 The gallery is deserted. Everyone is dead, including the child. A woman is also dead there by the Professor's feet and about her small broken insects.

GATE: It is time.

PROFESSOR: Someone should remain to bury them.

GATE: Time will do this. We to elsewhere must go.

Pic 9 The Professor is now standing in the sky, with the Gate beside him.

PROFESSOR: Where are we now?

Page Four (Nine panels.)

Pic 1 The pair suddenly find themselves in a city in the air. People are milling about, some silvery, or gold, or various other shades. The city appears almost like a version of the 1950s style of 'super science' with pristine towers, etc.

GATE: This is Aziralgn. Beyond this lay nothing. Look.

Pic 2 The Professor is staring upward into the sky. It is a slight shade of blue.

PROFESSOR: What am I looking for?

GATE: Through my senses see above. What do you see?

PROFESSOR: **Nothing.** No stars. No other worlds. Nothing beyond this solitary sun, this solitary earth.

GATE: This is where all things end.

Pic 3 Great swarms of airships and balloons can be seen swirling about the city in the air. These people all seem to congregate here.

GATE (v. o.): The last echoes of men come here. The last echoes of women. All save one. Do you see him? He is there below.

Pic 4 Upon the grass sea below a lone man is walking. As he walks the grasses tear into his flesh, tearing him apart.

PROFESSOR (v. o.): What is happening to him?

GATE (v. o.): He is the last memory of all that came before him. He is the last repository of the dead. But beyond him lay nothing, nothing except the thin thorns and the grass sea. The worms, the yarans and yairans, even these seas of sky and even these cities of wind lay as much in him as they reside here.

Pic 5 Professor and Gate seated upon the edge of the city, looking out into void and grass sea below.

GATE: Our time is ending, as it does. When it does all will be caught in fire and storm. But there is nothing after this, no shore to cling to, no boundary to rail against. It is the end.

PROFESSOR: Except it isn't. Time is a labyrinth, not a straight line. If I have all this inside of me, including memories of him, and you put me back where I was before it doesn't really end, does it? That's really why you plucked me from my own time and set me here, isn't it?

GATE: It is.

PROFESSOR: How will it happen?

GATE If you wander in the grass sea you will burn and be torn apart, but only as a fragment. The remainder of you we will place back where you were, so that all will be preserved, even after the end of things.

Pic 6 Continuation of Pic 5

PROFESSOR: Well, there's no time like the present. Do it.

Pic 7 The Professor is now wandering the grass seas, body torn apart from the thorns, screaming.

Pic 8 The Professor is back in his own classroom. It is dark now.

Pic 9 The Professor walks outside whispering to himself.

PROFESSOR: In the garden, there strayed
a beautiful maid,
as fair as the flowers
of the morn;
the first hour of her life
she was a man's wife,
and was buried before
she was born.

At the same time, a ghostly outline of him can be seen in the grass seas which are superimposed upon the dark buildings and trees of the campus, screaming as he walks while the Professor calmly or silently moves on.

SILVER ALBION

Story One Basceilos

Page One (Six panels arranged three by two.)

Pic 1 Across a black desert two riders are coming. One is armoured in pure white, the other draped in robes of grey and the horses they ride on are winter white. The one in armour is leading and has a black sword by his left side. Riders moving right to left across the black desert.

Pic 2 In the distance behind them stands the Pale Castle. It has innumerable thin towers rising from the rounded base and a massive gate sits like a maw in the middle at the bottom and countless small windows can be seen.

Pic 3 Ahead of them stands an ocean, shades of blue rising and falling like waves, providing subtle appearance of beasts, or dragons.

Pic 4 Riders are on the sea, their horses riding upon the waves as easily as on the land.

Pic 5 Close-up of armoured one, the knight in shining armour, his face serious, pale, his hair red and rising up and down as if from the hoof beats on the sea. His face is angular, handsome, his eyes pale blue.

Pic 6 Close-up of one in grey robes, his appearance more haggard, eyes utterly black, a hook nose, a wicked grin. Fingers are long and thin, ending in black fingernails and he appears to not only be grinning but enjoying the road ahead.

Page Two (Six panels, three by two.)

Pic 1

BASEILOS (v. o.) It was in the final age of the Civilized Lands, long after the scouring of the worlds, long after the wild magics had been subdued, long after all hint of the old gods had been wiped from my kingdom, that the defilers came.

The two riders are seen approaching another shore, various golden cities lined on the shore. The knight has in hand his black sword, and the grinning one seems to have gathered winds and storms in the trailing of his passing as if a storm were following them.

Pic 2 King Basceilos is standing on a balcony, miles above the world. He is a large man, bald, dressed in finest golden garments, in his hands a crown. Servant behind him, kneeling, dressed in silver and visibly afraid. He is facing Basceilos and is positioned away from the reader so his face cannot be seen.

SERVANT My king. We have word from the barbarian lands the defilers have been seen approaching our kingdom.

BASCEILOS Well am I aware of it.

SERVANT The armies of the sun have been assembled at General Mordan's command, and merely await your word for them to march against the evil ones.

BASCEILOS If my word is needed gladly do I give it. Send them as a wave against the shore and serve well their liege, in ending those who would destroy my kingdom.

SERVANT I hear, and obey.

Pic 3 The servant can be seen leaving, leaving Basceilos alone on the balcony.

Pic 4 Basceilos is alone.

BASCEILOS Oft have I dreamed of the rider and his sword. Oft have I dreamed of his blade against my throat, never knowing why. Still not knowing why his blade cries out for my blood. What wrong have I done? What wrong have I done? All I did I did in the service of my kingdom.

Pic 5 Arrayed are thousands of men dressed in red armour, creating a wave of scarlet on a bronze shore. The riders have pulled up and are waiting on the beach. The knight is called El-Seirwyn.

EL-SEIRWYN To the armies of the kingdom of Galgaliel, hear me! I and my squire Scapegrace have no quarrel with you or yours. Let us pass and your lives will be spared. You owe no loyalty to your king. He is not as he seems. Only by my blade Nightbringer can he find the justice he seeks.

MORDAN Your words make no sense monster, but that is not my concern. It is not for justice or honour we fight. We fight because the king is his kingdom and his kingdom is our home. The wasps of a wasp's nest do not debate when the beast is at their door. They strike. Prepare yourselves monsters, for by my blade my justice against you will be done.

Pic 6 The army rages down toward the pair. El-Seirwyn holds up his blade which blackly glistens in the sunlight.

Page Three (Six panels.)

Pic 1 He strikes outward and the blast of this attack sends the armies back, some seemingly broken, others dead. Scapegrace is in their midst and seems about to pounce upon one as if to devour him. Mordan is lying broken some distance from the carnage.

EL-SEIRWYN Scapegrace. Not now.

SCAPEGRACE My liege, I hunger.

EL-SEIRWYN The feast will remain after the deed is done. There are not enough ravens

in creation to strip all the flesh from these dead. Come. You will have your pleasures when the wicked deed is done.

Pic 2 Basceilos on his golden balcony, watching the carnage from below and far away.

BASCEILOS He seeks me out, and the price of my safety is the death of my people. I will not have it. I will not have it. I have no other choice. I must meet my death, or else death will claim they I love.

Pic 3 Basceilos is walking from the great city of golden towers, walking toward El-Seirwyn and Scapegrace. Basceilos is otherwise alone.

BASCEILOS I am here defiler! Come and claim your victim. None more will die because of me.

Pic 4 El-Seirwyn gets off his horse and approaches Basceilos.

EL-SEIRWYN Tell me, do you know why I have come?

BASCEILOS To kill me, though for what reason I do not know.

Pic 4 El-Seirwyn has the blade before him, horizon to the ground.

EL-SEIRWYN Tell me, do not remember this blade?

BASCEILOS No.

EL-SEIRWYN You should. This is the prison of your father and your father's father. And this was my prison also.

Pic 5 Image of Basceilos has changed. Instead of bald-headed in golden robes there is an after-image over him of some hideous beast, obese, headless, with mouths along his palms, and a black crown hanging above where his head would be. El-Seirwyn is changed, form riddled with tentacles, black eyes molting along countless tendril-like limbs, stretching far above image of the man.

Pic 6 Their forms return to normal, only now Basceilos is kneeling on the ground.

BASCEILOS What magic is this?

EL-SEIRWYN You were living in a dream world, pretending yourself a man. You escaped into this shell and pretended the nightmare was a nightmare only.

Page Four (Six panels.)

Pic 1 El-Seirwyn is behind Basceilos, his sword drawn, about to plunge into the neck of the once good king.

EL-SEIRWYN But now the dream is ended.

Pic 2 Sword plunges through Basceilos's neck, as the after-image of the beast evaporates in a sea of light.

Pic 3 Two riders return to shore where the dead and broken remain.

SCAPEGRACE May I feed now, my liege?

EL-SEIRWYN You may feed my squire. The dead are yours.

Pic 4 The golden cities remain and the people are gathered, standing by doorways, standing on streets, wailing their displeasures, their despairs.

Pic 5 Scapegrace raises his head up from the neck of some soldier, as if listening.

SCAPEGRACE They weep my liege. They weep.

EL-SEIRWYN I know. But each of them had lain suspended as insects in amber my squire. The cities had remained as they were forever.

SCAPEGRACE And before forever, my liege?

Pic 6, continuation of pic 5.

EL-SEIRWYN Before forever was the kingdom of my kind. When you are finished return to the Pale Castle. I will be waiting there where we will decide our next sojourn.

SCAPEGRACE Fair you well then, my liege. I will be a time.

EL-SEIRWYN Before I go my squire swear you will not kill any here, but take only the dead.

SCAPEGRACE My liege, what manner of killer am I? None here fell by my hand.

EL-SEIRWYN I know. I know.

Story Two Slurusuluas

Page One (Six panels.)

Pic 1 The deep ocean, isles of coral in the deep blue depths, rising like trees of leaves. A massive shadow can clearly be seen over these seas. El-Seirwyn can be seen wandering these ocean depths, still in his armour.

Pic 2 He glances up to see the shadow pass, his sword drawn.

Pic 3

SLUR (v. o.) And what little thing are you?

EL-SEIWRYN I am the possessor of the Gem of the Abyss, wielder of the Nightbringer.

SLUR (v. o.) And what brings you little thing to my realm?

EL-SEIRWYN I seek knowledge of my people, they who succeeded in the War of Ascension.

SLUR (v. o.) The War of Ascension occurred billions of years ago. No beast of air or earth remembers it. Even I have forgotten the greater part of it. Why seek me?

Pic 4 Close-up of El-Seirwyn's face.

EL-SEIRWYN Because we created you to be an instrument of war, an engine of ruin, and as our created you owe fealty to us.

SLUR (v. o.) As *you* owed fealty to your makers?

EL-SEIRWYN We warred against our makers for making us their slaves. You we granted the greatest of our powers, you we fashioned as a god's hand, moulded to thunder and fire. You are the offspring of Tsalihyal, the wellspring of our ideals, made in the image of our hopes. If you owe no fealty to us who do you owe fealty to?

Pic 5 The beast can be seen. It is massive, sixteen limbs like the fins of a whale, a massive maw, hundred eyes about this maw, body the colour of rotted gold, not bronze nor orange but a sickly version of both.

SLUR I owe fealty to myself, I who have lingered in the under-lands since the dying of the old gods.

EL-SEIRWYN If not fealty then fear. This is the key I use to strum the answers from your tongue, beast. You know what Nightbringer is.

SLUR Amusing little thing, I have not felt fear in forever. Show me again the blade and let me feel fear. By that payment will I answer you.

Pic 6 A Close-up of the blade can be seen, with Slur in the distance, as if aimed directly at the beast.

SLUR Yes, I remember this feeling, aim it closer and I will answer you.

Page Two (Six panels.)

Pic 1 The blade is touching the beast's hide.

EL-SEIRWYN Where lay my people?

SLUR They are not of this world anymore little thing.

EL-SEIRWYN They are dead?

Pic 2 Continuation of Pic 1

SLUR No, not dead. If you are indeed one of the servitors of the old ones you remember they fashioned many worlds in their time, many lands beyond this parent sun. After the dying of the old ones some lingered here but the greater number fled as exiles to other earths, to other skies.

EL-SEIRWYN Which earths, which skies?

SLUR Think I would keep track of each step they took? They have fled and the worlds they could have fled to are limited. Beyond this, I know not.

Pic 3 Distant look at both beast and man, showing how much larger Slur is than El-Seirwyn.

EL-SEIRWYN Very well. Then I will take my leave of you.

SLUR Think you can leave so easily?

EL-SEIRWYN Think you can stop me?

SLUR That is not what I mean little thing. I have answered you but you have not answered me my question.

EL-SEIRWYN Which is?

SLUR What will you do when you find your lost race? What reason have you to seek them out? You are no longer one of them. Your skin is sick with humanity, your mind sick with human thoughts. You were imprisoned in Nightbringer while the world became infested of men and wendigos and

dragons. Now freed what will you do should your race be found to you?

Pic 4 A view of a ruined city in the arctic cold. Clearly an alien place of grey and silver and blue.

SEIRWYN (v. o.) I will either be one with my people or be the end of my people or be ended by my people. Only time will tell which fate is mine.

SLUR (v. o.) Then go and find your doom or your reward, as if there is some sliver between the one and the other. But know that the world has moved on without us in it. Why not pretend to be a man and dream away your true nature?

SEIRWYN (v. o.) Because I have seen those who have, and in dreaming they forced the world to dream with them. I seek no dreamless dreams of mortality or some farce of pretending. I am that I am. I am true to what I am. If I am the end of my kind or the lost child of my kind I must know. It is my nature.

SLUR (v. o.) Then go, seek out the demon city that lays at the spider's centre of the roads between the worlds and find what you seek. But do not come again little thing, for I am hungry and have not eaten such as you in so many seasons the centuries are mere mayflies in my mind. Go. For this moment alone you face no war.

Pic 5 El-Seirwyn is walking from the ocean to the shore, Scapegrace waiting for him.

SCAPEGRACE Have you found the answers you seek?

EL-SEIRWYN Some, but not all.

Pic 6 Again the view of the demon city.

SEIRWYN (v. o.) Soon we will have to go into the country of your birth and from there the stars.

SCAPEGRACE My country? Are you mad? Why do I even ask the question? Lead on sire, lead on.

Story Three Calisarda

Page One (Six Panels.)

Pic 1 A distant view of the demon-haunted city. It is blue and silvery and surrounded by endless wastes of winter. It has blunt towers, as if partially eaten at by time, and is circular in appearance, like the heart of a spider's web laid upon the snow.

Pic 2 A woman can be seen creeping into the ruined city. She is dressed in blue and white, head to toe covered, concealing her face, but is clearly a woman. A long flowing mane of red hair can be seen fluttering behind her.

Pic 3 She quickly hides this under her hood and continues into the city.

Pic 4 The riders can be seen coming upon horseback, and behind them, another is running, a horned monstrosity which towers over the pair of them.

SCAPEGRACE My liege it is madness! Why have you not struck him yet!?

SEIRWYN We must wait! We must be within the limits of the city!

SCAPEGRACE Why!?

SEIRWYN You will see!

Pic 5 The pair enter the main gate of the demon city and the beast is suddenly barred from following them.

SEIRWYN My people forged Nighthbringer to quell the old gods, but the only way to make certain the blade could catch its quarry was if a trap were lain. All about the city of S'giliraisulasu'a is a dampening sigil designed to lessen the blade's force. While within the city . . .

Pic 6 Seirwyn raises the blade and a blast of force is carried out, obliterating the beast.

SEIRWYN Its already considerable power is increased tenfold. Come. We must reach the gate rooms if we are to begin the search for my lost race.

SCAPEGRACE Did you not think it prudent to tell me this *before* encountering one of my people?

SEIRWYN Prudent perhaps, but it is always good to keep fear in company. Don't you think so, my comrade?

SCAPEGRACE If I didn't know you as I do, I'd swear you told a joke.

SEIRWYN Perhaps it is simply this human skin of mine bleeding through. Come, let

us go.

Page Two (Six panels.)

Pic 1 Continuation of Pic 6

SCAPEGRACE I'm going, I'm going. Even if it's to my doom.

SEIRWYN Doom and fate my friend, they are mirror reflections of the other.

SCAPEGRACE And yet only one would I prefer.

Pic 2 A view of the woman Calisarda following them deeper into the demon city.

Pic 3 Amid massive ruined streets and plazas the pair are walking.

SCAPEGRACE So tell me sire, how is that this city of . . . what did you call it?

SEIRWYN S'giliraisulasu'a.

SCAPEGRACE So how is this city still standing after billions of years?

SEIRWYN Because of this. (Indicating his sword.) During the War of Ascension when the old gods died, my people gained ascendancy, rising to their place of power. A portion of that swirling vortex of omnipotence remained after they fled, embedding itself in the walls, the streets, even the air. The wreckage we see here is the product of only eons of decay, not the epochs of centuries which should have been written here.

Pic 4 Continuation of Pic 3

SCAPEGRACE And from here lay other worlds?

SEIRWYN If the beast spake truly then yes.

SCAPEGRACE And if he lied?

SEIRWYN Violence has an honesty all its own Scapegrace. It did not lie. And see? We are here.

Pic 5 Before them is a massive dome and a massive gate. The pair seem about to enter.

SCAPEGRACE A problem my liege?

SEIRWYN We are observed.

SCAPEGRACE By whom?

SEIRWYN I do not know.

Pic 6 Seirwyn turns, scanning the ruins behind him.

SEIRWYN I sense you, daughter of man. Yet you still elude me. That is a rare talent. You are not here to cause ruin, nor here for war. You desire something. Speak plainly and perhaps I may grant it unto you.

CALISARDA (v. o.) I seek only the treasure of the demon-haunted city. Let us pass like ships in the night, never seeing the other's form from here on.

SCAPEGRACE Treasure?

SEIRWYN How did you get past the gyalgeireb? How did you elude the cannibal spirits of the winter cold?

Page Three (Six panels.)

Pic 1 Winter wastes, with great giants, horned with the horns of deer wandering about. A woman can clearly be seen slipping past them as if invisible.

CALISARDA (v. o.) I will not reveal my secrets, certainly not to one who may be my enemy. It is enough that I can elude them, and it is enough that I can elude you.

Pic 2 Continuation of the pair before the great dome and the massive gates of silver and blue.

SEIRWYN Very well. I have no reason to waste time debating your prowess. Though I am curious, of what treasure do you speak?

CALISARDA (v. o.) The lost treasure of the demon race. With it I would be wealthier even than the kingdoms of Penthisilea and Galgaliel.

Pic 3 Close-up of Seirwyn's face, with Scapegrace to his right.

SEIRWYN The treasure you speak of lay here within the galleries of the Horned Monarch Xyxalos, but I doubt even a multitude of men could move it. Come squire, we must continue our journey.

SCAPEGRACE What of her?

SEIRWYN She may seek her treasure but it will only lead to us. If doom or fate has led her here one or the other may lead her further along our road. But I will not drag her the distance. Come.

Pic 4 The pair are in the gallery. To either side of them are statues of various horrors, things of tentacles, horned gods with terrible visages, etc.

SCAPEGRACE What manner of beast are these?

SEIRWYN These are the authors of the world. Here lay the bloated demon sultan Tsuareib, the ender of things, his form the avatar of the storm. Here lay Lhyaeib, the God of Doors, whose domain we will seek audience in. And here lay Tlziathriul, the Unspoken One.

Pic 5 Image of Basceilos kneeling on the sands, Seirwyn standing over him, sword drawn.

SCAPEGRACE Was not it the one . . .?

SEIRWYN The one who escaped, the one who hid in the bodies of animals and plants, and stone, passing like a disease through the eons until taking possession and form of a man? Yes, this was the one I killed.

Pic 6 They are back standing before the various statues.

SEIRWYN Tlziathriul the Defiler and Yulutlsyla the Chaos Born, they were the catalyst, their depravities against my kind so great, their burdens imprinted on our flesh with such force rebellion was our only grace.

Page Four (Six panels.)

Pic 1 The image of the Pale Castle, and Nightbringer embedded in a stone block at the heart of it. The Gem of the Abyss can be seen and within the swirling blackness tendrils and tentacles can be seen swirling about.

SEIRWYN (v. o.) Even at a cost so great. Even at the imprisonment of myself in the Nightbringer blade.

Pic 2 The gallery.

SCAPEGRACE So where is this gate my liege? You did not mention its location or shape before we left.

SEIRWYN I could not for I know not. The treasure she seeks, we seek, is not a physical object like the Gem of the Abyss. It is a place in this gallery, a door between the worlds which is only noticed as one passes through it.

SCAPEGRACE So we must simply walk to find it?

SEIRWYN Not walk. Wait.

Pic 3 He raises the blade high in the air and the entire gallery is illuminated in black light, all save a place at the centre where shimmering blue and eddies of white are seen.

SEIRWYN Here it is, or at least the threshold of it. Only as we walk through will the door

take shape and allow us to choose the earths we will walk upon and the skies which will cling over our heads. Be cautious. My people would not leave the door unguarded.

Pic 4 Calisarda has crept behind them by now and is in shadows, waiting.

Pic 5 The pair walk toward the shimmering vortex of white and blue.

SCAPEGRACE How will we know which world has your people in it?

SEIRWYN We won't. But fortunately, once we cross the threshold from this world to another crossing from world to world after will be a simple matter. And there are only so many worlds the old ones dreamed of.

SCAPEGRACE How many?

SEIRWYN Fewer than a hundred. Greater than ten. Some after all must have been lost or destroyed along the way.

Pic 6 Continuation

SEIRWYN You are welcomed to come with us mortal. (Turning behind him.) To have braved the north wilds and their treachery makes you unique, so perhaps you are deserving of our company. Our comradeship.

CALISARDA You don't know me.

SEIRWYN I suspect I know enough. I can smell the mark of Xyxalos on you, and the talons of Ysgairylen have rent your body. You seek treasure but also escape. Tell me, how far away is the Greyslayer from us?

Page Five (Six panels.)

Pic 1 Continuation.

CALISARDA You know of the avatar of the hunting god?

SEIRWYN I have the wounds to show it.

CALISARDA He is a day's march south, but coming closer. I can feel it. You have fought him?

SEIRWYN Twice. Once victorious, once barely clinging to my life.

Pic 2 CALISARDA emerges from the shadows.

CALISARDA I am Calisarda. I was marked by the Greyslayer for death, and have been hunted by him ever since. I thought here I would find some wealth, build up enough walls to keep him out.

SEIRWYN Walls will not save you. But wings? Wings may. We are flying from this sphere to another. The Greyslayer cannot follow. And we have need of one who can elude the avatar of the hunting god.

CALISARDA What do you seek elsewhere?

SEIRWYN My people, to join with them or end them.

SCAPEGRACE He is conflicted on that point. I swear.

CALISARDA Then lead on good sir. Lead on.

Pic 3 The three enter the vortex, but as they do so thousands of arrows are seen flying toward them, stopped by the magic of the Nightbringer.

SCAPEGRACE Oh, surely you jest.

Story Four Megalodon

Page One (Six panels.)

Pic 1 A massive shoreline, beyond it an even more massive sea. The three seem like specks of dust on the shore, with the ocean to the right of the panel and the beast to the left.

SCAPEGRACE So this is another world?

SEIRWYN This is Tarhengira. The world ocean.

SCAPEGRACE We seem to be on land.

Pic 2 Close-up of the three wandering the shoreline.

SEIRWYN An illusion I'm afraid. This is the further country of Lhyaeib, these the workings of his hands. This is not land we stand upon but the transition from nothing to something and back. Were there none to see it this shore would disappear and be replaced by sea again.

CALISARDA So are your people here?

SEIRWYN No. If my kind dwelled here there would be cities, even cities of the mind. These sands are recent, coming into being only at our step, and will depart once our steps are gone from off the shape of them. They are not here.

Pic 3 In the ocean a massive shape, easily larger than Slur can be seen, or rather the shadow of it beneath the waves, coming toward them quickly.

SCAPE (v. o.) My liege, I smell something, there in the world ocean, coming toward us.

Pic 4 Seirwyn draws his sword and stands facing the water with the other two behind him, Calisarda to his right, Scapegrace to his left.

SEIRWYN Be wary and be prepared.

SCAPEGRACE When I am not my liege?

Pic 5 View from behind the three as a great megalodon roars up near the shoreline, its maw opened, as if waiting for them to enter into it.

Pic 6 Close-up of Calisarda.

CALISARDA Why does the beast pause?

SEIRWYN It is waiting for us to enter into its jaws. I know this beast. I know the intelligence behind it.

Page Two (Six panels.)

Pic 1 Seirwyn approaches the beast.

SCAPEGRACE My lord!

SEIRWYN Hold. I know what I am doing.

Pic 2 Seirwyn is standing inches from the jaws of the megalodon.

SEIRWYN Your name, I would know it.

BEAST I am Ilcualigog, and what manner of thing are you? (Does not move mouth.)

SEIRWYN I am the possessor of this. (Raising his sword.) You know this Gem?

BEAST The prison of Tzezayl. Aye, I know it.

Pic 2 Continuation.

SEIRWYN We have come here by accident and would leave as easily. I have no quarrel with you.

BEAST **But I have quarrel with you.**

Pic 3 Seirwyn is doubled over in agony before the beast. As are Scapegrace and CALISARDA.

BEAST Murderer of my father, slayer of your makers, feel my mind wash over your own. Feel the jagged spines of my hatred pierce you and after you are washed clean of thought or memory or desire enter into me and fulfil the only purpose deserving of your kind. **Oblivion.**

Pic 4 Seirwyn is starting to crawl to the beast, as are Scapegrace and Calisarda.

Pic 5 Then Scapegrace touches the ground and it starts to freeze over, as a river of ice marches directly into the maw of the beast.

SCAPEGRACE Let your hunger be satisfied by this!

Pic 6 The beast is writhing now as the cold has clearly pierced through its body, creating spines which are ripping out, making countless spines emerge all along its body. The three are standing as it enters its death throes.

CALISARDA Is the beast dead?

SCAPEGRACE Near enough to it.

SEIRWYN We must leave. If there are more children of Lhyaeib they will soon come.

Page Three (Six panels.)

Pic 1 Continuation.

CALISARDA Why could you not simply kill the beast? Why did you speak to it?

SEIRWYN I hoped it was like my people, freed of their origins. The beast's intelligence was equal my own. I had hope perhaps it had followed a similar path as my own kind.

CALISARDA One would think after billions of years it would not hold a grudge.

SEIRWYN Time moves differently world to world. On Izyalhrya indeed eons have passed, more, but here? Here perhaps Lhyaeib had only been murdered hours before.

Pic 2 A view of the shoreline again from high up.

CALISARDA So you hope perhaps your people have only been in exile a short time?

SEIRWYN Or perhaps what was billions of years for your world was trillions for mine. Time is a fickle thing. We cannot know until we have gone through it. The next world beckons, so let us go.

Pic 3 A view of the ruined carcass as it is fed upon by some crabs and other creatures, as the shoreline slowly collapses into being and returns to the endless sea again.

Story Five Tsulesqe

Page One (Six panels.)

Pic 1 A vast jungle, seen from above.

Pic 2 The three are treading through the underbrush, with Seirwyn in the lead, carrying Nightbringer before him.

SCAPEGRACE Know you this world?

SEIRWYN It is Xalriquela, the library of Tsulesqe.

CALISARDA This is a library?

SEIRWYN It is. We have simply not seen the volumes hidden in it yet.

Pic 3 A great serpent is crawling behind them. It is massive, easily larger than Seirwyn in width.

SCAPEGRACE Tell me, have we reason to fear the beasts of this country as the beasts of Tarhengira?

SEIRWYN Perhaps less, perhaps more. As I said, time moves differently world to world. Tragedies of eons ago may remain fresh in the minds of the dwellers here, or such tragedies may be so forgotten as to have degenerated into myth.

SNAKE Or perhaps nothing is ever forgotten or ever can be, no matter the passing of time.

Pic 4 Three turn to see the serpent coming upon them.

SEIRWYN Here sits a volume before me.

SCAPEGRACE Call you *that* a volume!? What do you call a word, a serpent's tooth!?

SNAKE He speaks truly little creature of the ice and snows. You are Seirwyn, are you not?

SEIRWYN I am.

SNAKE Come with me.

Pic 5 Four travel the foliage and before them is a great clearing. In the midst of this is a vast pool and about it countless serpents, some larger than the beast accompanying them, many smaller.

SNAKE Behold the pool of memories. Behold the volumes of the library of

Tsulesqe.

SEIRWYN Do you consider me your enemy?

SNAKE It was not you who slaughtered Tsulesqe, nor your kind. What reason have we to war with you?

Pic 6 Three approach closer to the pool.

CALISARDA I know not the name Tsulesqe. Who was he, or she, or it?

SEIRWYN The first child of Tzezayl was Tsulesqe. Where Tzezayl was the void-bringer, the final shadow, the conclusion of all, Tsulesqe was the gentle ending, the wistful realization that all must end. Tsulesqe crafted the first worlds, long before the creation of Izylhrya, and among his creations was this library of the living.

Page Two (Six panels.)

Pic 1 A view of the entire planet from space, with a few other moons about it.

SEIRWYN Here all are saved, each scrape of each thought, each book and history, and dream. The daughters and sons of Tsulesqe needed only drink from the pool of memories and any thing that might exist anywhere they would know.

Pic 2 The three now nearly at the pool.

SEIRWYN From here anything one desires to know is known. But only they can drink the waters and provide answer to us. Even one such as I could no more drink these waters and live than you could breathe the void.

Pic 3 The snake has come amongst them now.

SEIRWYN So tell me, will you drink and learn of where my people lay and reveal this truth to me?

SNAKE I will. But there is a price.

SEIRWYN Name it.

SNAKE You murdered Tlziathriul, did you not?

SEIRWYN I did.

SNAKE And among the first gods your people slew many. Did they not?

SEIRWYN They did.

Pic 4 A Close-up view of the pool with their reflections seen inside of it.

SNAKE One truth eludes us in all creation that neither time nor wisdom provides. Tlziathriul and the Chaos Born caused ruin and the other children of Tzezayl bred nightmares, but all of this was precipitated by the death of our maker.

Pic 5 Seeing the four again right side up now.

SNAKE This alone we know not, who it was who killed him. I will give you passage and road to where the exiles are, but in payment, you swear on Tsalihyal that this death will be avenged.

SEIRWYN And if the murderer is already dead?

SNAKE Knowledge avenges, little one. What is a day here is eternity elsewhere. A blade does not avenge, only the knowledge of whose treachery was bred by whom. Swear.

SEIRWYN By Tsalihyal I swear that I will do all that is in my power to do to find the one who slew your maker and bring him to account. I can do no more than that. I will not swear an impossibility.

Pic 6 Continuation

SNAKE And I know it would be pointless to demand of you an impossibility. You have sworn and so I know you will succeed. Of the murderer, I have no knowledge, of you I know all.

SEIRWYN The deal is struck. Drink, provide us wisdom of my people's destination and we will depart off the boundaries of your world momentarily.

Page Three (Six panels.)

Pic 1 The serpent enters the pool, its lower body still upon the grass.

Pic 2 It departs and it raises its head to Seirwyn's left ear, whispering some secret it seems only he has the right to know.

Pic 3 The swirling eddies of light and grey and blue open as the three are prepared to pass through.

Pic 4 The pair are gone.

Pic 5 Another serpent comes to the Snake.

SERPENT Was it wise?

SNAKE Wise? Perhaps not. But the deal is struck. The truth will out. What will be will be.
Even as all the worlds are ended like sea foam passing into sea.

Pic 6 A view of the jungle planet from space.

SNA (v. o.) Sometimes there is no difference between doom and destiny.

Story Six Csologacz

Page One (Six panels.)

Pic 1 Three are on a broad plain with massive trees about. The landscape is mostly orange and in the sky great insects can be seen, like flies and mosquitos combined together.

SCAPEGRACE Where are we now my liege?

SEIRWYN The plains of Csologacz. The world that lives.

CALISARDA I have heard of this place. Is not this the country meant to suffer?

SEIRWYN Indeed. The flying things drink the blood of this land, consume some scrapings of its flesh. This is a land in misery.

Pic 2 Nightfall by now. Three are gathered about a fire, massive trees great shadows and translucent wings of the insects still left shimmering in the air.

CALISARDA It has been hours. Why are lingering?

SEIRWYN The serpent told us this was the destination of my people, but I do not feel them here. I hoped after some hours a truth might be discerned.

SCAPEGRACE Did the beast lie?

SEIRWYN Truth cannot lie. Csologacz is the destination, yet this is not the endpoint.

Pic 3 Close-up of CALISARDA's face.

CALISARDA Strange the fire dr . . . steaming here.

SCAPEGRACE What were you going to say?

CALISARDA I was going to say dreaming here.

SEIRWYN Curious. Slur mentioned I should pretend myself a man, dream myself a humanity.

Pic 4 Three remained huddled about the fire.

CALISARDA Why do you not pretend? You claim to be a servitor of the old gods yet your skin is mine, not that of an older thing.

SEIRWYN I have not told you the story, have I? Of why I am condemned to this skin.

CALISARDA No.

SCAPEGRACE My liege, let me tell her first since our meeting was the fulcrum upon which the drama is hung.

SEIRWYN Very well. After you are finished I will conclude the tale.

Pic 5 A view of the Pale Castle, though where it was once partly in ruins this appears fresh, well made.

SCAPE (v. o.) The Pale Castle was where my liege lay imprisoned. It was a citadel built upon some other sphere, cast at Izyalhrya in the final years of the War.

Pic 6 A view of the shoggoth, tentacled, massive, and in hand some weapon, not a blade but an indescribable instrument of spines and oddly jointed cubes, as if it did not exist fully in the world. Before the shoggoth lay an inky blackness like the pit of hell.

SCAPE (v. o.) In those times my lord was called Ulseirxalos, and it was he who imprisoned Tzezayl, the Last Shadow. But in the act of imprisonment, reality itself bent around the point.

Page Two (Six panels.)

Pic 1 A view of the Pale Castle again, only now clearly in ruins in its ‘normal’ state.

SCAPE (v. o.) In the final moments of his victory, my liege was cursed, stone-imprisoned in the same prison as Tzezayl, placed at the event horizon just before the pit. In the wake of this life *twisted* becoming opposite its former truths. Where once nightmares clothed flesh now our flesh was closed over to conceal nightmares.

Pic 2 The black blade embedded in a block of stone at the centre of the Pale Castle.

SCAPE (v. o.) All was as all remained, until my stumbling into the castle.

Pic 3 A massive beast like that which they encountered riding toward the demon city can be seen pursued by many men riding on horseback. Armed with flaming arrows the beast had already been hit and wounded many times, just as it entered the threshold of the castle.

SCAPE (v. o.) In those days I was truly gyalgeireb, truly a cannibal spirit of the cold. So great was my hunger I ventured south, deep into the Empty Places where a horde of raiders discovered my trespassing. They were displeased to find me so far south.

Pic 4 The beast stumbles forward into the darkness and deepest part of the castle, stumbling upon the blade just as more arrows pierce his hide.

SCAPE (v. o.) So displeased they violated their own rules and ventured into the Pale Castle to hunt and slay me, upon sacred ground.

Pic 5 His blood covers the sword as there is a flash of black light, illuminating everything about in the equivalent of a film negative from how things had been in the previous pic.

Pic 6 Unseen before, standing behind the beast was a man, one whose appearance was identical to Seirwyn. This is the man Seirwyn possesses now. Clearly his sword has pierced through the beast, and his face has been cut, meaning his blood too has sprayed upon the black sword embedded in the stone.

SCAPE (v. o.) Our blood united created the key, opening the door enough for Seirwyn to crawl through, but not so great for Tzezayl to follow him.

Page Three (Six panels.)

Pic 1 The thing of tentacles is suddenly interposed with the man.

Pic 2 The thing of tentacles is suddenly gone, leaving the man alone to stand before the wounded beast.

Pic 3 Close-up of the man's face.

SEIRWYN Of what madness is this? Where am I? Where have the centuries gone?

Pic 4 The other men arrive, armed and ready for battle. But Seirwyn has already grasped the sword and pulled it up, ready to use.

Pic 5 By now the beast has slunk to a far wall as Seirwyn raises the blade up and in a flash all the men are flattened to the ground.

SCAPE (v. o.) That was my first meeting with my lord.

Pic 6 The three are still huddled about the fire.

CALISARDA And after your first encounter?

SCAPEGRACE After he defeated my pursuers he looked into me, realizing my hunger was a latent trace of one of his old masters. He stilled this hunger in me, for the most part, then realized just how long it was he had been imprisoned inside the Gem.

CALISARDA If only blood were needed to open the lock why did not Seirwyn's people do it moments after his sacrifice?

SEIRWYN This is where I begin the tale.

Page Three (Six panels.)

Pic 1 The Pale Castle again, though clearly not upon Izyalhrya. The country here is orange and there are no seas nearby.

SEIRWYN (v. o.) The Pale Castle was conceived as a jewel, fashioned upon some unknown world. It was the temple of Tzezayl, the offering pit of the god of destruction. By War's end my people realized the Pale Castle was also the perfect trap, the labyrinth by which the god of the pit could be subdued.

Pic 2 The Pale Castle shimmers through space now.

SEIRWYN (v. o.) We dragged it through void like a net, forcing Tzezayl to be dragged along in the wake of its mass and cast it to Izyalhrya, the impact of which shook destruction's god so that this final point of my blade could pierce its hide.

Pic 3 The Pale Castle can be seen back upon the shore.

Pic 4 Again the black blade in the stone, and about it are gathered several of the tentacled things.

SEIRWYN (v. o.) But in the act of this victory, we shattered time itself. We split creation along strips of reality, breaking the laws of existence in the progress.

Pic 5 The three are at the fire again.

SEIRWYN Izyalhrya was the epicentre of this ruin. A billion years passed there, myself imprisoned, but as I have said elsewhere time runs differently, and even upon Izyalhrya time is more illusion than truth. You asked why I was not freed sooner? I too would like to know the answer since my freedom had been part of the plan. I can only imagine either that time sped so quickly my people forgot the language of the key, or time broke so slowly even reaching for my prison took more time than the dying of suns.

Pic 6 Close-up of Calisarda's face.

CALISARDA But that does not explain your human face.

SEIRWYN (v. o.) It does.

Page Four (Six panels.)

Pic 1 Close-up of Seirwyn's face.

SEIRWYN When I realized the gyalgeireb lived, that the icchaliarians swam in the seas, that the moth people still floated in the oceans of the sky, and that souls as yours existed, having evolved in the wake of our passing into night, what choice did I have but keep this skin as my own, while knowing I can never walk the life of a man?

Pic 2 In the distance great insects can be seen descending, feeding upon the flesh of the world.

SEIRWYN (v. o.) This face is the reminder that my race and time is passed, that I am clinging to visage of an alien thing which is itself now the native country of the new world. If I pretend I am not Seirwyn, if I pretend I am simply some rude murderer whose grasp of the world extends no farther than the Empty Places than in time I will become but that, even while the sins of my first self still cling to me.

Pic 3 The demon city of his kind.

SEIRWYN (v. o.) I am the endpoint of the sentence of my people, a language run or an execution held in the amber of suspense. By this blade I was imprisoned, by this blade I will seek my race, by this blade I will either subdue my pain or extend it to those who left me in the void.

Pic 4 They return to the fire, as light begins to dawn.

SEIRWYN Does that answer your answer? I will not wear my own face for I will not show my true self to those who abandoned me. I may murder them. I will not betray them and allow them to realize exactly who it is who wishes their potential ruin.

CALISARDA And if instead you do not kill them, but join them?

SEIRWYN Then I will have no need to carry this skin further but shed it like a chrysalis in summer and retake my place among them.

Pic 5 Scapegrace has stood as if listening to/for something.

SCAPEGRACE My liege, I hear something strange in the air.

SEIRWYN The world is in pain.

SCAPEGRACE Yes, but that is not what I hear. You said you could not feel your people here. Mayhaps be true, but I feel something stirring. This world is not the world. Its shape be shifting somehow.

Pic 6 The others stand as if in listening to.

CALISARDA What does he mean?

SEIRWYN I feel it also now. It is as if Csologacz were trying to run, to crawl through some hidden space and escape. But escape . . .?

Page Five (Three panels.)

Pic 1 High above them three massive spheres can be seen.

SCAPEGRACE My liege, what are they?

SEIRWYN They are the Parasite Moons, the devourers of worlds. I had thought them devoid of reason since their minds my people stole.

CALISARDA They are coming here. What will they do?

Pic 2 The three moons seen from space.

SEIRWYN (v. o.) They will devour the place of suffering and hollow out this planet until it is an empty husk. They will leave no living thing alive.

Pic 3 The three again staring at the moons.

SCAPEGRACE We should depart my liege.

SEIRWYN We cannot.

SCAPEGRACE Why?

SEIRWYN Once they have your scent space and time are no distractions nor deterrents to their crossing. They will follow us to the end of existence and each further world we touch upon are but the offered sacrifices they will take in pursuit of us. This world is doomed and ourselves with it unless we act now.

CALISARDA And what exactly must we do?

SEIRWYN Arrive upon Yuggolith, the greatest of the three and either convince them to stop their rampage . . . or kill those worlds with ourselves standing upon them. Else this be done our lives be forfeit.

SCAPEGRACE Lead on into hell then, my liege, lead on.

Story Seven The Parasite Moons

Page One, (Six panels.)

Pic 1 The three arrive upon a black landscape, their own forms silhouetted in the twilight. Before them is a massive mound, partly a dome and partly a mountain, and they can be seen in the distance, so they all appear tiny in the background of darkness.

Pic 2 The three open the massive gates and step within.

Pic 3 Inside is a great emptiness and at the heart of it sits a jagged tear in reality.

SCAPEGRACE What manner of monstrosity is this?

SEIRWYN It is the engine of destruction Scapegrace. It is the heart of this world, a black maw whose only intelligence is in hunger of the void.

Pic 4 He draws forth Nightbringer and aims it at this swirling rip in existence.

SEIRWYN Yuggolith, spawn of Ysgoroth, sister/brother of Nuroon and Xualusque, your prey is here, but to consume us is to be wounded by us. Speak, if you can, and we shall parlay.

Pic 5 A great rumbling is ushering from this tear of reality. Out of this something extends, a form, humanoid, yet composed of the same rip in existence, the same shattering of emptiness, as this void-form emerges from the rip and addresses them.

YUGGOLITH Parlay, prey, pray, prayer, say, slay, grey, grey slay, greyslayer, greyslayer, greyslayer . . .

SCAPEGRACE Is it mad, my liege?

BAASTET Why does it mention the avatar of the hunting god?

SEIRWYN I know not.

Pic 6 The form comes toward them, but jaggedly, as if in pain. It points a finger directly at Calisarda..

YUGGOLITH Prey, prey, prey, pray, pray, pray . . .

CALISARDA It desires me. Somehow Greyslayer has usurped the beast for his own ends.

SEIRWYN Not Greyslayer, but his maker. Ysgairylen the hunting god has taken possession of these worlds. And if so, even my blade is insufficient.

SCAPEGRACE Your blade holds oblivion at bay. *This* is too much?

Page Two (Six panels.)
Pic 1 Continuation.

SEIRWYN It is using Yuggolith as a cat's paw. Even if I strike and kill it two more remain, and the hunting god itself remains, and it may reanimate these broken worlds after I am finished with them.

YUGGOLITH Pray, pray, pray, prey, prey, prey . . . *My prey.*

Pic 2 The void-form rushes, not to Calisarda but to Seirwyn, and only his blade rising up is enough to halt the monstrosity, it places horizontally in front, the void-form clutching the blade with both hands.

YUGGOLITH I know you, I glimpsed you in the eye of my avatar. When finished with you, and her and he I will devour Csologacz and render it ruin. Pray, pray, pray, prey, prey . . .

SCAPEGRACE Pray for yourself beast!

Pic 3 Scapegrace unleashes a torrent of cold, seemingly freezing the beast in ice.

Pic 4 A moment later the ice shatters off and Yuggolith is now staring at Scapegrace.

YUGGOLITH I will enjoy ending you upon my talons. But first the strongest prey.

Pic 5 The pair struggle a moment but Yuggolith tosses Seirwyn to a far wall.

YUGGOLITH So easy, so simply. Prey, prey, pray . . .

SEIRWYN Pray?

Pic 6 Seirwyn approaches Yuggolith.

SEIRWYN You reveal yourself by your madness.

YUGGOLITH Do I? And how do I do this?

SEIRWYN Pray. Even the prison of Tzezayl cannot hold you for your true self is elsewhere across the universe, and even should you fall your avatar the Greyslayer remains. But I have wisdoms of my own, gleaned over the millennia I slumbered in the shadow of Tzezayl. So, I shall defeat you the only way that appeals to your vanity.

Page Three (Six panels.)
Pic 1 Continuation.

YUGGOLITH And how might this be accomplished?

SEIRWYN By praying to you, summoning you, and bringing you here.

Pic 2 Horror crosses the featureless visage of the abominable thing.

YUGGOLITH No! Even should you summon me you cannot slay me!

SEIRWYN Why your panic then!? Hear me hunting god! I Ulseirxalos, first of the servants of the old gods, champion and wielder of the Nightbringer, last child of the forever age before, invoke you and pray that you, hunting god, be summoned to my midst! By the old laws I make my prayer! Appear!

Pic 3 Suddenly a horned figure emerges next to the void-form, golden in colour and with a deer's skeletal face. It towers over the three and the void-form and is wearing long golden robes, its hands skeletally long and thin, its right hand pointing toward Seirwyn.

YSGAIRYLEN Fool! To bring me here saves you not! I am power incarnate, I the last surviving remnant of the first to step foot across creation! The Gem of the Abyss shall not imprison me.

SEIRWYN No, it shall not. But we stand upon Yuggolith, oh hunting god. To step foot here is to slowly be devoured in the gravity of the leviathan, and the greater the strength of ours the greater the devouring.

Pic 4 The golden aura of Ysgairylen seems to be slowly sinking into the black stone it strides upon.

YSGAIRYLEN No, I control the beast, I hold dominion of Yuggolith.

SEIRWYN Dominion does not mean satiation. Yuggolith hungers. Hunger owes no fealty even to its maker.

Pic 5 The sinking of the aura speeds up as Ysgairylen slowly becomes grey in appearance.

YSGAIRYLEN No, no, no, you cannot do this, not to me! I was the last, I was the remnant of the oldest ones! I must escape, must flee . . .

SEIRWYN Only by my invocation shall you be free!

YSGAIRYLEN Your death is equalled the end of your invocation. I need only . . .

Pic 6 Ysgairylen takes a step toward them only for its legs to crumble like dust.

YSGAIRYLEN How?

SEIRWYN The more you exert the faster you fall. Arrival here is a death sentence for you. To move is to hasten your extinction.

YSGAIRYLEN You planned this . . .?

SEIRWYN How? We only knew of your involvement after our arrival. We summoned not Yuggolith nor its brother/sisters. This ruin is your own.

Page Four (Six panels.)

Pic 1 Ysgairylen is lying upon the black stones. The three lingering over it.

YSGAIRYLEN My death is not the end. Greyslayer lives. My avatar endures. He will seek you out . . .

SEIRWYN I hope he does. My blade wishes to be stained by his ichor.

YSGAIRYLEN So much I wished for, so much I wished to end. You are cursed for slaying a god . . .

Pic 2 Close-up of Calisarda.

CALISARDA Your avatar hunted me for no reason. If your roles were reversed and I cursed you for the slaying of me, would you take the curse to heart? No more do we.

YSGAIRYLEN But I am a god. What *nothing* are you?

SEIRWYN Your executioners. Consider that a broader curse, to be slain by that which you despise.

Pic 3 The three are now alone, the beast is gone.

SCAPEGRACE As gratifying as the death of a god is, we are still hurtling toward the ruin of Csologacz, are we not?

SEIRWYN We are not.

SCAPEGRACE Come again?

Pic 4 The three exit the dome and stare at the sky. Csologacz is not there, nor are there any familiar worlds.

SCAPEGRACE Where are we?

SEIRWYN Wherever Ysgairylen was when I summoned him.

CALISARDA What do we mean?

SEIRWYN I did not bring Ysgairylen to us. I brought the Parasite Moons to him. It was his own folly to step upon this poisoned ground.

Pic 5 Continuation.

SCAPEGRACE Ground which will kill us too in time?

SEIRWYN After the consuming of a god these three are satiated till the end of stars, though even that is a short season for such as these. We are not worth the feeding of.

CALISARDA Seirwyn, Scapegrace, look.

Pic 6 A planet of gold comes into view.

SEIRWYN Ysgairylen's realm. This was where he hid after the War of Ascendency.

SCAPEGRACE I feel something strange my liege, but I can explain it not.

SEIRWYN I can. I know that feeling my squire. It is the familiar scent of my kind, as alien a scent to you as this skin is to me. We've found them.

Page Five (One panel.)

Pic 1 View of the golden world and the three moons orbiting about it.

SEIRWYN (v. o.) We're home.

Story Eight Tzezayl

Page One (Six panels.)

Pic 1 The three are standing upon a vast golden plain with canals of bright blue inter-spaced between the lands. In the distance are many spires and towers, similar to those of the Pale Castle.

SEIRWYN My people are dreaming here. I can sense them all about me.

SCAPEGRACE I too sense them my liege, but where are they?

CALISARDA Perhaps the hunting god slew them and only their ghosts remain?

SEIRWYN No. These are not ghosts I feel, but lives. And they are dreaming, which means they were not prey to the hunting god. Ysgairylen would not hunt that which sees not the talons come.

Pic 2 They approach the nearest collection of towers which seem to stagger into the sky.

CALISARDA Strange to find such structures marred here.

SCAPEGRACE Marred?

CALISARDA Do you not feel it, wendigo? This place is wounded before the first stone was laid.

SEIRWYN She's right. And it was not by Ysgairylen that the wound was made.

SCAPEGRACE How do you know?

SEIRWYN Likewise, I know the hunting god would not kill those who feel not his venom come into their veins. Ysgairylen does not wound but kills. If this were his handiwork no wound's life would be here to be felt by us.

Pic 3 The three enter into the city and towers, searching, but finding only empty places.

SCAPEGRACE This city seems a dark reflection of Jabal Saa, back on Izyalhrya.

CALISARDA You have been to Jabal Saa?

SCAPEGRACE Once, before I was turned to a creature of the north. I was once a man, and when a man I dwelled at Jabal Saa a time.

CALISARDA I have only ever heard legends of that city.

Pic 4 An image of Jabal Saa, located at the heart of a valley with five roads leaving it, going out in all directions.

SCAPEGRACE It was once a place of legends, true. But that was between the falling of the old gods and the emergence of the kingdoms of the west. I was born long after that, when much of the city was left abandoned and the very thought of its older empire long extinguished.

Pic 5 The view of the golden city again, the three of them wandering through. Seirwyn has bent down and is examining the sand at their feet.

SEIRWYN This ground is bleeding venom, souring with our every step.

SCAPEGRACE Your people can change form, perhaps they changed into sand.

SEIRWYN No, there is no mind attached to this country. Csologacz held intelligence that I could feel, even in its suffering. But this country though wounded is silent. No thoughts are attached to the pain. Only pain.

Pic 6 Continuation.

SCAPEGRACE Alright then my liege, we are here at the crossroads of your destiny, so choose.

SEIRWYN Choose?

SCAPEGRACE These labours have led us here, and these labours were weighed down upon us by your desires. You have found, if not your people then their destination. It is here. (He spreads his arms out.) So I ask you, now that we are here what do we do?

Page Two (Six panels.)

Pic 1 Close-up of Seirwyn's face.

SEIRWYN My race is here run to ground. We can scour this world and nothing *may be* found. The Parasite Moons are above us, and they ferried us from the destination allotted by the serpent meaning these steps were laid out by the library of Tsulesqe. The serpent laid a burden upon me, to find the murderer of Tsulesqe, and since the serpent-tomes of the jungle world know all else but that fact only they knew the machinery which set us here. Therefore, we find the slayer of the old god we find my people.

CALISARDA And wherever shall we look to find them?

SEIRWYN Xyxalos. The continent of your body is the first clue we seek.

Pic 3 A Close-up view of Calisarda's right arm.

SEIRWYN This was where you were marked with the mark of Xyxalos, yes?

CALISARDA Yes.

SEIRWYN And after this did the Greyslayer come?

CALISARDA Yes.

SEIRWYN Xyxalos was the light twin to the aspect of nature, as Ysgairylen was its darkest reflection. Now that both halves are gone from off the living worlds any touched by both would have the treasure of both.

Pic 4 Continuation.

CALISARDA How will this happen?

SEIRWYN I will forgo a portion of my human self, render an older part of my being partly into the world, and merge myself with you. United in this way I will see and direct not yourself but those far beyond you, those older things that marred you. I will see through your eyes their sight.

CALISARDA Will it hurt?

SEIRWYN It will be agony, but not for you. I will be pulled along their perceptions. You will merely be the conduit of my torture, yourself oblivious to my agonies.

CALISARDA Small comfort, I guess.

Pic 5 Part of Seirwyn's left arm transforms into a tendril which seeps into CALISARDA's right arm, with Scapegrace standing to one side, as if wary or attentive.

SCAPEGRACE How long will this take?

SEIRWYN Forever. Or, at least that is how it will feel for me. For you and Calisarda only moments only. It begins.

Pic 6 Close-up view of Seirwyn's face as it contorts in agony.

Page Three (Six panels.)

Pic 1 A vast plain and upon it dozens of ancient abominations milling about. These are creatures of tendrils and voids and countless limbs and at the heart of it is Tzezayl, represented by a vast black void, greater and deeper than the rest. Seirwyn can be seen in their midst, his face contorted in misery and pain.

Pic 2 Suddenly only two remain, one the horned god, the other a woman of leaves and flowers, both standing next to the other.

SEIRWYN Show me your sight. Show me your senses.

Pic 3 View of a vast forest, superimposed by a view of animals being slaughtered, as if seen from two sets of eyes.

SEIRWYN These are the times after your beginning, when Tsulesque's existence was ended. But you are the children of Tzezayl, you see all that your progenitor saw, even as this is obscured to mortal eyes. Show me the dying of your kin.

Pic 4 An image of Tsulesque is revealed, a serpentine being, and a creature of tendrils and tentacles comes to it.

SEIRWYN Tlziathriul.

Pic 5 Tlziathriul attacks Tsulesque, ending the old god.

SEIRWYN So this was how Tsulesque died. But why? And why did not Tzezayl avenge the death of its offspring, even against its offspring?

TZEZAYL (v. o.) That should be obvious. Because I wished the deed done.

Pic 6 Seirwyn is standing before the black pit, as it addresses him.

SEIRWYN Tzezayl. How is it that you are here?

TZEZAYL This is the dream of Xyxalos and Ysgairylen, and in their dreams I lived, though still imprisoned in the Gem. I exist as a lich here, swiftly undying even as the greater of me remains trapped in stone.

SEIRWYN Tsulesque was ended by Tlziathriul. Why?

TZEZAYL Because I demanded it.

Page Four (Six panels.)

Pic 1 Continuation.

TZEZAYL Can you not imagine it, little thing? I was the first of all living things, the first that drew the breath of mind, the first to taste eternity and suffer oblivion lightly. And my children each took upon themselves varied dominions, all set to follow in my footsteps. All but Tsulesque. He differed from all else.

SEIRWYN And so you had him extinguished?

TZEZAYL Little did I know his ending mirrored my own. But it hardly matters. You slew Tlziathriul, did you not? You ended him, and ended them. Ysgairylen was the last, save only Tsalihyal, the god your people created in mockery of the true faith of the true gods.

Pic 2 The vast plain again populated by the ancient eldritch horrors, Seirwyn and Tzezayl at the middle of it.

TZEZAYL With all else gone and your people gone as well only the lesser souls remain. And when the Gem is broken and I escape I will place creation in the shadow of my wing and turn the candle suns to blackness. And all this accomplished through you, and your searching for your people.

Pic 3 Continuation.

SEIRWYN If you are but a dream I need only awaken to end you. And you have answered nothing regarding why. Why did one of your own have to die?

TZEZAYL He would have supplanted me. He would have placed at the center of all things not this stiff oblivion but existence, life, hope, flexibility of thought. Do you not hear yourself little thing? The mechanistic words you say are not the product of your own reason, but mine. You think your thoughts are your own, but I seeped into Izyalhrya and blunted you all like stones cast by ocean. And with Ysgairylen extinguished when freed I will be greater than any in existence.

Pic 4 Close-up of Seirwyn's face.

SEIRWYN I still have the blade.

TZEZAYL (Unseen.) Here it is but a dream of a blade, but you and your mind are real and easily wounded. Just as I wounded the cities of gold, distorting any who walked upon them, elongating them sideways against the laws of reality. Face death little thing, and know the depth of my hate.

Pic 5 The black pit rises up as if about to swallow Seirwyn.

TZEZAYL You have no defenses against me little thing. *Die.*

SEIRWYN I need no defenses against you.

TZEZAYL What do these words mean?

Pic 6 Close-up of Seirwyn's face.

SEIRWYN Tsulesqe must have known the shape the universe would take. He was a

creature of wisdom after all. Perhaps it was his influence that kept me sealed as long as I was. And you are right. These words, the cadence of them is wrong. My quest, the structure of it too was wrong. I glance behind me and see a world of distortion, Izyalhrya sentenced to shifting patterns of time. Perhaps your final death will free me too.

Page Five (Six panels.)

Pic 1 A view of the vast blackness again, Seirwyn before it.

TZEZAYL What do you mean, little thing?

SEIRWYN You said it clearly yourself. You are the dream of Xyxalos and Ysgairylen, and I imagine at this moment of your triumph you imagined all things would fit well into the structure of your rebirth. But see, you have been deceived.

TZEZAYL Deceived how, by whom?

SEIRWYN By Tsulesqe I imagine. Is it not strange for us to be here, now, you prepared to strike, I prepared to allow it? Yet, we have only reached this point because I came and I came only because I was barred alongside you in the pit. I can only imagine it was your intervention that prevented their freeing of me, but I suspect this was done through the machinations of Tsulesqe, in knowing what you were, and the need for a final end of you.

Pic 2 All the eldritch creatures are gathered about.

TZEZAYL Delaying your death will not savour the seconds remaining to you.

SEIRWYN I delay nothing. We are in dream's country, and you the dream of two dead gods, suspended in existence by a mortal woman's mind. And she is no more aware of you than sea foam would be aware of a desert in bloom with fire. Come, kill me. I dare you. I am the only living thing in this dominion right now, and I am the only sustaining particle keeping your memory alive.

Pic 3 Close-up as a human face appears in the void of Tzezayl, the face of Seirwyn's own.

TZEZAYL This is impossible. All I did, all the pieces I moved in the game to be freed, all meant for my escape, all meant so that I would never escape. My child you damned your creator twice!

Pic 4 Close-up of Seirwyn's face.

SEIRWYN Not damnation, but atonement. You were the first life, the first to gaze into the abyss, but the abyss gazed equally into you, distorting you into its

shape, fashioning like-minded abominations, all but one who might supplant you and be greater than all of you, by being nothing like you. It's over. His death was his first move against you. And my last move against you is my first move away from the weight of you. Strike me as you wish, but I am leaving, and when I leave, either by death or escape, the void of this dream will full the totality of you from the Gem of the Abyss into the further abyss of this illusionary country . . .

Pic 5 A door opens and Seirwyn begins to walk through.

SEIRWYN And what happens to a dream or dream's country when the sleeper is awake and all memory of the dream is gone?

Pic 6 The void rises up as if preparing to strike but then.

TZEZAYL No! No, you cannot leave me, you cannot leave me, not like this, not like . . .

Page Six (One panel.)

Pic 1 An image of the void fading away, and with it all the abominations about, fading into nothingness all at once.

Page Seven (Six panels.)

Pic 1 Seirwyn appears next to Calisarda, his brow wet with sweat. He is laying on the ground.

SCAPEGRACE My liege, do you hear me?

SEIRWYN I do, my squire, I, I can hear you just fine.

SCAPEGRACE What happened?

Pic 2 Seirwyn is sitting up.

SEIRWYN I learned who killed Tsulesqe. It was Basceilos in his first life, ordered by Tzezayl.

SCAPEGRACE You sound strange my liege, you sound . . . wait? I too, I'm sounding weird myself.

CALISARDA What's happening to us?

SEIRWYN Tzezayl wasn't just trapped in the Gem. His last act was to trap us too. You mentioned Jabal Saa?

Pic 3 Continuation.

SCAPEGRACE Yes.

SEIRWYN Said it was like this place?

SCAPEGRACE So what?

SEIRWYN There are only so many shapes in a god's mind. This shape was repeated before, and so were we. Forced to impose a plan we never chose.

Pic 4 Seirwyn is standing up, helped by Scapegrace and Calisarda.

SEIRWYN But I am awake now, my friends. The doors are opened, the possibilities vast. I want to shake off whatever I was and become something better than I am.

CALISARDA All well and good but where are your people? Are they the sand, or ghosts, or . . .

SEIRWYN They are here. Tzezayl told me without telling me. They are lengthwise against reality, like shadows at evening. Sorry, it will take time to lessen my words. But they are here, and with my blade, I will free them.

Pic 5 The three are outside the city as the sun is setting.

SEIRWYN Do you see the shadows?

SCAPEGRACE Only our own.

SEIRWYN No, not just our own.

Pic 6 Continuation but now the desert is swarming with thousands of shadows, all of them humanoid, or close to it.

SEIRWYN My people are here. It's time to free them.

CALISARDA How?

SEIRWYN This is the gamble. The Gem of the Abyss held Tzezayl and shattered reality. If Tzezayl is gone and dead and I shatter the Gem it undoes everything that happened after the death of the old gods. Reality runs correctly for the first time in forever.

SCAPEGRACE But if Tzezayl is still there and alive shattering the Gem will break it, unleashing havok and destruction into all things?

SEIRWYN That's the gamble.

Page Eight (One panel.)

Pic 1 Seirwyn has placed the Gem on a stone in the desert and has raised his blade up as he did when he killed Basceilos.

SEIRWYN May my blade be true, and may I be right.

Page Nine (Six panels.)

Pic 1 The Gem is shattered, a Close-up of the broken pieces of the jewel on the stone.

Pic 2 Suddenly all the shadows become people, some human, others not.

Pic 3 The three are surrounded by all these people.

Pic 4 The three lead the people into the city.

Pic 5 Night falls and the city is filled with light.

Pic 6 Continuation.

SEIRWYN (v. o.) I picked correctly, sending Tzezayl's broken prison into oblivion alongside him. Slowly Scapegrace and CALISARDA have started to sound more . . . human. After our celebration we three knew what we had to do. We had to bring my people back to Izyalhrya and further repair the world. With the old gods dead what remains to be fixed is the mortal condition. A subject on which I have become . . . extremely familiar.

End

BODIES AT WAR

AZRAEL

The angels in high places who minister to us
reflect God's smile, their faces are luminous,
save one, whose face is hidden,
 (the prophet saith,)
the welcome, the unbidden, Azrael,
angel of death. And yet that veiled face
I know is lit with pitying eyes,
 like those faint stars, the first to glow
 through cloudy winter skies.

That they may never tire, angels
by God's decree bear wings of snow
and fire, passion and purity,
save one, all unavailing,
(the prophet saith,) his wings are gray
and trailing, Azrael, angel of death.

And yet the souls that Azrael
brings across the dark and cold, look
up beneath those folded wings
and find them lined with gold.
Robert Gilbert Welsh.

Story One

Page One (Nine panels.)

Pic 1 A vast battlefield. Thousands are dead here, their bodies broken and bleeding. Yet a few are staggering up. And one of them is reaching down for pieces of the dead.

Pic 2 Blackness.

SOLDIER: I know they won't ever let us go home. Someday the war will end and perhaps we'll win, though by that time I don't think the term 'we' will matter. They're afraid of us. As you will be.

Pic 3 A camp in the middle of nowhere. Soldiers are there, some with missing limbs, missing eyes, and the dead scattered about. These soldiers are clearly taking the limbs and eyes and reattaching them to themselves.

Pic 4 The Soldier, with half his half dark and half pale is staring ahead, while behind him the camp remains.

SOLDIER: At first you feel numb knowing pieces of you are lying out there where you'll never find them. They are like remnants, like fragments from some time before, or some time to come, since you know they will be picked up, to replace what another lost.

Pic 5 A view of deep space with the planet seen, and a moon about it.

Pic 6 The battlefield again, only now the Soldier is lying down, his body cut to pieces. Half his face is gone. A hand is reaching down and pulling half his face away, by Another Soldier.

(A) SOLDIER: At first you feel numb knowing pieces of you are lying out there where you'll never find them. They are like remnants, like fragments from some time before, or some time to come, since you know they will be picked up, to replace what another lost.

Pic 7 Camp, with Another Soldier standing where the first soldier was.

(A) SOLDIER: I know they won't ever let us go home. Someday the war will end and perhaps we'll win, though by that time I don't think the term 'we' will matter. They're afraid of us. As you are now.

Pic 8 The world is seen from beyond, exactly like in Pic 5.

Pic 9 A vast battlefield. Thousands are dead here, their bodies broken and bleeding. Yet a few are staggering up. And one of them is reaching down for pieces of the dead.

Story Two

Page Two (Nine panels.)

Pic 1 A jungle scene. A small metallic insect-like craft is flying about.

PILOT: I am crashing, jungle coming up too fast. I look back, my enemy is closing in and I feel the shockwave of the blast.

Pic 2 The craft is destroyed as another golden insect appears above it.

Pic 3 A room seen from below, as if someone were on a bed. Doctor is peering down, female, on the right side.

DOCTOR: Dizziness?

PILOT: No. I feel alright. Except I am still falling.

DOCTOR: That will pass.

Pic 4 The jungle planet, seen from the depths of space.

PILOT (v. o.): We were at war. Our enemies possessed bodies unlike ourselves.

Pic 5 A golden metallic planet, upon it countless machines, none of them remotely humanoid.

PILOT (v. o.): They occupy machines as we occupy flesh, though they are no more machine than we are simply skin. Somewhere beyond their true bodies are, their true minds residing on some planet we haven't discovered yet. They send out their proxies, mayfly bodies they wear, intending to send us to oblivion for differing from what they imagine life to be. We are an abomination to them.

Pic 6 The jungle world again, seen from space.

PILOT (v. o.): Our only hope lay in being as they are, occupying their alien 'flesh.'

Pic 7 The insect craft is again seen, flying, but now far above another sort of ship can be seen.

PILOT (v. o.): Before we were merely sparring, waiting for the match. Now the trap is set. The beast has come.

Pic 8 The same room as before, the same Doctor, but now the Pilot is standing up.

DOCTOR: You ready?

PILOT: No. But do I have a choice?

DOCTOR: If this works you might never be who are you.

PILOT: You've described death Doctor.

DOCTOR: I've described winning the war.

Pic 9 The craft is just above the golden insect, prepared to fire.

PILOT (v. o.): **Now.**

Page Three (Nine panels.)

Pic 1 Suddenly the golden insect seems to veer to one side as the larger, greyer craft rises upward. The insect is about to slam into a pillar of stone.

PILOT (v. o.): Success.

DOCTOR (v. o.): Success?

PILOT: I am in possession of the enemy craft.

Pic 2 View of the room again, with the Doctor standing before what should be the Pilot, but isn't. She has a gun in hand.

DOCTOR: Sorry.

Pic 3 The golden world again. One of the machines has stopped, the others peering to glance at it.

Pic 4 Other scenes, other worlds. One of ocean, another of ice, a third of mountains, with the grey machines dismantling insects of silver.

PILOT (v. o.): It happened all at once; our soldiers switched places with theirs. Not knowing how to use our machines the beasts were stranded in metal cocoons, deaf, blind, and paralyzed, while we spent years understanding how their metallic bodies worked.

Pic 5 Armies of grey machines cross over an empty grey world, with the ruins of other machines breaking beneath their tread.

PILOT (v. o.): I am crashing, against the bodies of the enemy. I am soaring through countless skies, seeing through alien eyes. It was the only way we had to win the war and survive.

Pic 6 The golden world with countless machine bodies littered and dying on the ground.

Pic 7 The grey craft is again sailing above the jungle ground. Behind it are countless more.

PILOT (v. o.): Some day I will have to crash and reckon for my sins. Some day we will end when the machines stop. Or . . .

Pic 8 The same jungle with pieces of ruined ships lying everywhere.

PILOT (v. o.): When our wings fail us. You see, our new bodies don't have legs.

Pic 9 Rows of coffins with soldiers and pilots in them, all glass coffins arrayed in a grid in a grey room.

DOCTOR (v. o.): If this works you might never be who are you.

PILOT (v. o.): You've described death Doctor.

DOCTOR (v. o.): I've described winning the war.

THYLOK AND GREY

Story One Megalodons

Page One Six Panels (three by two)

Pic 1 Vast industrial city, billowing with smoke and smog. Shadows of people can be seen on the jagged, scarlet buildings, labouring, but it is all from a great distance and distorted by the smog.

Pic 2 A lone figure is wandering through the halls of a vast, mostly dark building. The figure is dressed in black and has two red eyes on a mirror-smooth blank surface where a face would be. He is walking forward, as if toward the reader.

Pic 3 He approaches massive doors and is in the process of pushing them open. They are rounded at the top and the motion seems to create the impression of a wave, as if the doors are vibrating as they open.

Pic 4 A throne room, and seated at the heart of it sits a figure. He is wearing armour, black and jagged as if damaged over many centuries, his face haggard, his eyes grey and filled with a certain hate. He is staring at the man approaching.

KING You've come at last.

Pic 5 The figure is now standing over the last king.

KING Say something to me! After all you've done to my world you owe me that much.

Pic 6 The figure, Raymond Grey, is now standing inches from King, as if preparing to kill him.

GREY (quietly) I forgive you.

Page Two Six panels (three by two.)

Pic 1 A blur is seen moving among the people as slowly the factories begin to shut off, one after another.

Pic 2 Three people, two women and a man are standing at the edge of a polluted, oil-tar sea. Garil Craesarn is the man, pale, with shards of triangular metallic hair, while Miranda Greaves is also pale, with silvery limbs and Catherine Fields is dark-skinned, with limbs like those of Miranda.

GARIL We're in position.

CATHERINE Just say the word.

GREY (v. o.) Wait.

Pic 3 Another man, paler even than Garil, is seen walking behind Grey, coming to him. His name is Morgan Nallan.

MORGAN Ren is almost finished.

GREY Good.

Pic 4 Both are staring down at the King, now desiccated and seemingly dead.

MORGAN Is he . . . ?

GREY No. Not exactly.

Pic 5 Continuation.

MORGAN What did you do?

GREY He claimed to be the world, didn't he? When we got here he claimed this world was his and he was it. I just gave him his desire.

MORGAN Ren is finished.

GREY Good.

Pic 6 Back at the oil-tar sea.

CATHERINE *Now.*

Page Three Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 The three spread out their limbs which are not organic but machine-based. Wires extend from Garil's fingertips and intermingle with their arms which seem to spread out and through the oil-tar sea.

Pic 2 The limbs seem to draw the very blackness of the waters into themselves as the waters slowly clear.

Pic 3 A young woman, Asian, is sitting in a room surrounded by massive machinery. Her name is Ren Ushima (Yagami.)

REN It's working. They're siphoning the hydrocarbons.

GREY (v. o.) How long?

REN Minutes.

GREY (v. o.) And the people?

REN Tagged. All of them. Are you sure this is the right thing to do?

GREY (v. o.) No.

Pic 4 By the oil-tar sea the three are walking toward the city, waters now sparkling.

Pic 5 The palace again. The King's face can be seen embedded in the walls around them.

MORGAN How long will he remain . . . ?

GREY Don't know. Maybe he deserves . . . worse.

MORGAN Don't we all?

Pic 6 The city has now become completely still. The shadows of the people have stopped working.

Page Four Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 The blur has stopped. A rail-thin man dressed in an oddly Victorian suit, bald and carrying at his side what appears to be two Japanese swords is standing at the top of one of the buildings. His name is James Moran.

JAMES Air quality has been fixed. Took most of the smog into orbit. But these factories are automated Grey. They'll be coming back in thirty minutes.

Pic 2 The throne room.

GREY We only need ten. Pick up Ren and bring her here. We're leaving.

Pic 3 Grey is standing before the wall and the face embedded in it.

KING You . . . are damned . . . for this.

GREY You aren't the first to say that. But I've already taken a stroll in hell. After that the demons avoided me.

Pic 4 Everyone has arrived.

GARIL The pollutants we took are enough to activate the gate.

GREY Good.

CATHERINE You're really going through with this?

GREY Deal's a deal. Are the coordinates they gave accurate?

MORGAN Yeah. No question.

Pic 5 The seven of them walk away from the face embedded in the wall, going out the doors they came.

KING You . . . are . . . damned!

GREY Then we are all in good company. I've never met one who isn't.
(Not looking back)

Pic 6 A flash of light through the city, throughout the world.

Page Five Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 A vast beach, pristine, beautiful. Countless people are upon it, clearly the same workers as before. Grey and company are also there, standing at the water's edge.

Pic 2 A shape can seen coming from the waters, a massive form, a megalodon. It pauses before the seven.

MEGALODON You are here.
(telepathically speaking)

GREY Made a deal.

MEGA These are ours?

Pic 3 Some of the people look about confused.

GREY We know what happened on this Earth, how you ruled till humans developed the means to hunt you, so you exterminated them. These humans were under the thrall of an immortal posing as a god-king for tens of thousands of years. They have no will, only need a guiding hand and they will walk into your maws obediently. You have no need to fear them.

Pic 4 Continuation.

MEGALODON You could have taken the knowledge from us.

GREY You could have given the knowledge freely. We are according to our natures. We have bartered, we each have what the other wants.

MEGALODON You are satisfied in our dominion of them?

MORGAN We gave you a bonus, two worlds for one. If you think we will lose sleep over this wander to the world they came from. You are no worse than

what they left behind.

Pic 5 The megalodon slips away back into the ocean.

A man approaches Grey and company.

MAN This is the paradise you promised?

GREY It is.

MAN But the beast . . . ?

GREY Will take no more of you than your former master, and likely less.
We've saved you as far as we are able. If you truly want to be free of the
beast's teeth the islands are full of stone and wood and rock. If you cannot
use those . . . you will lose no more than otherwise.

Pic 6 A circle of blue light opens and the seven walk through.

MAN Take me with you!

GREY You cannot come. To go where we've been would give you nightmares.

Page Six One panel

A view of the face embedded, not in the wall, but in the entire world, screaming and never able
to stop . . .

PIRANHA You willingly stayed behind?

Pic 2 Continuation.

MORGAN Considering what you are it would have either been me or Grey and I'm a lot less . . . patient than he is. I can get some answers more easily than him. He can only see what is, I can see what *isn't*.

Pic 3 Shark Man sits next to Morgan on his right side, the two facing the reader at an angle.

SHARK And what *isn't* it you see?

MORGAN As I said before, you first. What don't you see when you look at me?

Pic 4 The forest is gone to be replaced by a large gallery showing countless portraits of people. The four are in the middle of it.

SHARK Perhaps a demonstration is in order, of our power.

MORGAN I know your power. I can feel it permeating off you like glass vibrating in a hurricane. Answer the questions you pretend you didn't hear.

SHARK Very well. I am Eisengorm, the king of depravities and these are Serentris the god of serpents and Nyathrelotep, the shapeless form. We are but a few of those who have taken these masks to wear.

Pic 5 Morgan passes before a few of the portraits.

MORGAN And these are other faces you could have worn?

SHARK Precisely. Now why are you here?

MORGAN Second question. What don't you see?

SHARK I do not see one who can challenge me in power, I do not see anything but a small pathetic little vampire who originated from a world where your kind were common until extinguished by a beast from an earlier age whose company I would have enjoyed. That is all I see.

MORGAN Before our conversation is done you will see more.

PIRANHA Why did you interrupt our game little vampire?

Pic 6 Continuation.

MORGAN Because I do not understand the point of it.

SHARK Then let us explain.

Page Three Nine panels (three by three)

Pic 1 A view of a vast primordial Earth with great crawling behemoths of tendrils, tentacles and eyes marching over it.

SHARK (v. o.) This world which in primordial ages we called Thathsligol was populated by our kind in our truest form. We possessed power you could not comprehend, able to shift the laws of reality to our liking. Then came man.

Pic 2 A few rough tribes of humans are seen huddling in caves, faces illuminated by firelight.

SHARK (v. o.) Unlike the other beasts of the earth, these were capable of imagination, possessing a concept of reverence we found intoxicating.

Pic 3 Countless humans are before one of the swirling masses of tentacles, clearly worshipping it.

SHARK (v. o.) And the more they worshipped the more intoxicating it became.

Pic 4 Cities are built with the old ones at the centre of them.

Pic 5 Then destroyed in a blast of energy from the same creature.

Pic 6 A second city, seemingly more advanced and then . . .

Pic 7 Another destruction, from a different eldritch horror.

Pic 8 The old ones gradually change appearance, becoming more and more humanoid until finally . . .

Pic 9 The four of them standing in the gallery.

SHARK For a time we sustained ourselves in their worship but the greatest worship always led to death, fear of dying, experience of extinction causing their worship to increase proportionally to their fear. Of course, it couldn't last.

Page Four Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 Continuation.

SHARK Eventually we reasoned we could get nothing more from their destruction, nothing more from being worshipped. So, we became these, divesting ourselves of most of our power while amplifying our worshippers' interest in us. It is so much easier for a man to worship something that also looks like a man.

Pic 2 Morgan is standing before the portrait of one of the old ones.

MORGAN And what are your plans for this world?

PIRANHA Plans? Our plans are what we are doing now.

RATTLE Create villains, capture them, release them, do it again. Protect the cities from alien invasions, psychotic clowns, thieves in garish dress and would-be conquerors of the world. There is nothing more complex to it than that.

MORGAN And the dead?

RATTLE When the villains have been run ragged enough we let them rest. You were in one of their sanctuaries before you woke them up.

Pic 3 Morgan is standing before another portrait, that of a girl being consumed by one of the eldritch things.

MORGAN You said rest, not death.

SHARK Each created by us is taken by us, now and always.

MORGAN Or shaped by you into misshapen form.

SHARK Your tone displeases me, little vampire. And you can do nothing to us. You would be foolish to try.

Pic 4 Morgan turns before them all.

MORGAN Leave this world in peace and never return. Go into the dark underspaces below the pillars of eternity and existence and never venture into the places of reality again, or you will die, all of you, here and now. This is my final warning.

Pic 5 The three laugh at him.

SHARK You cannot be serious. You are ***nothing!*** You are a fragment adrift in an ocean infinite. You do not know the power we possess.

MORGAN Last chance. You have done much harm in this world, but I give you a chance to leave in peace. The alternative for your entire lineage is death.

Pic 6 Shark Man rears up before him.

SHARK And who are you to challenge the dark kings of the Earth!? Who are you

little vampire that you dare stand against us!?

MORGAN I am Morgan Nallan of the Vampire Nation, descendant of the barrier which separated humanity from its extinction, descendant of the hunters of berserker-kind and I am the walker between the worlds, the navigator of infinite places. And as you have given me your answer I have given mine. And my judgement is finished with the lot of you.

Page Five Nine panels (three by three)

Pic 1 Morgan is no longer in their gallery.

SHARK Where has he gone?

PIRANHA Where have we gone?

SHARK What do you mean?

PIRANHA We are not in our own world anymore. I do not feel the ground beneath us or hear the rush of our native gravity. He took us elsewhere.

Pic 2 Approaching are countless others, all garishly dressed like superheroes.

SHARK He took all of us away. The fool. We need only follow our way home . . .

RATTLE What is that? I hear something Eisengorm, but what do I hear?

SHARK I know that sound . . . I know that sound! No!

Pic 3 The room in which they all reside is seen approaching a black sun, or rather a black hole.

Pic 4 The room smashes into it, scattering the old ones along the surface of the black sea, like fragments, fragments of their faces and forms set adrift upon the infinite waters of night.

Pic 5 Morgan is sitting back on the stone, the dead now buried.

MORGAN A long time ago my people ruled over the entire world. We built cities of silver and ravens of iron. And then one day we found a small band of new creatures huddling in the caves and took them out, and learned what they were.
(talking to himself)

Pic 6 A view of a vast city of silver populated by vampires, some with long necks, some with bat wings, etc. And coming toward them a vast sea of giant bats, descending from the sky.

Pic 7 The bats swarmed over the city, killing many while a lone vampire stood fighting against one of them with a family of humans behind him, father, mother, two children, boy and girl. The girl looked just like the girl in the portrait.

Pic 8 Morgan sitting on the stone again.

MORGAN I don't know what made my ancestors fight so desperately to save them or why in the end they considered the cost fair, losing so many billions to keep mankind alive. Maybe I'll never know. But their blood flows through my veins.

Pic 9 Continuation.

MORGAN And so long as my blood flows whenever I see humanity treated . . . *thus*, something boils in me and won't let me rest. But I think you can all finally rest. It is time for you all to dream a dreamless sleep, in the night country without end.

Story Three The Year of Ending Things

Page One Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 A man is racing in a sixties-era car down what appears to be a suburb in London, a London which also looks like it is from the 1960s. His name is Thomas Knythos and he is dressed in rather flamboyant psychedelic clothing, complete with rather elaborate sunglasses.

KNYTHOS Darling, I know, I *know*, now relax a bit. I'm on it. Leave everything to me.

He was seemingly talking to no one, but clearly, there is something in his ear.

Pic 2 A circle of blue light appears in the middle of the street and out of it step Grey and everyone, minus Morgan.

KNYTHOS Bloody hell. This is gonna ruin my day.

Pic 3 Knythos has exited his car and approaches them.

KNYTHOS You lot, what are you doing here?

GREY We crossed the barriers between . . .

KNYTHOS Right, right, I know dimension hopping when I see it. Need a bloody permit to go hopping in the middle of the streets though. My word. Not a civil bone in your bodies. What if you stepped out and the guy in traffic wasn't paying attention, mind? Bugger me. Alright, come in. Get you settled after I've parked.

JAMES He seems nice, I like him.

REN Nice, yes, not the word I'd use.

Pic 4 The seven are seated at a table in a pub, Knythos having ordered drinks which are about the table. James noticeably has only tea.

KNYTHOS Alright you lot, what gives?

GREY We've been scattered across different universes the last few months.

KNYTHOS Trying to get home, right?

GREY Trying, yeah.

KNYTHOS Well how far have you gone? How many Earths have you seen?
CATHERINE No more than twenty. We come from different worlds ourselves though

. . .

KNYTHOS Kinna gathered that . . .

CATHERING So about 16, maybe 17.

KNYTHOS Sounds about right.

JAMES Right?

KNYTHOS Not the first travellers, like I said. So only twenty Earths, eh? Must have come after Thylok.

GREY Thylok?

Pic 5 Continuation.

KNYTHOS Not important right now. Important thing is while you're here we're putting you to work.

JAMES Come again?

KNYTHOS You landed in London mates, and with the way the world is you got to pay your bills if you stick around long enough to get your bearings.

CATHERINE We don't plan on staying long. We received coordinates on how to shorten the route home.

KNYTHOS Yep, and those coordinates run adjacent this Earth. We're a speed trap, my dear. You want to go one step further you got to pay your tab for stepping foot on sovereign soil first.

GREY And how exactly do we do that?

KNYTHOS Any of you know anything about being a spy?

Pic 6 Close-up of Grey's face, which is dark-skinned, and he is smiling.

GREY Just the smallest bit. Yeah.

Page Two Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 The seven of them have gathered in Knythos' own quarters where he is showing slides of someone, a woman dressed in white.

KNYTHOS This is Illyria.

JAMES Nice picture.

KNYTHOS Thank you. She is an assassin, spy and all-around evil person. You are going to catch her for me.

CATHERINE You have no idea who we are or what we can do. You don't even know if we can be trusted. Why are you asking us to do this?

KNYTHOS Like I said, pay your tab. You landed on my doorstep and as a representative of this Earth and this nation's government, you are officially drafted. As for trusting you, I'm a spy. Trust is not an issue.

JAMES I would imagine telling total strangers you are a spy is an issue though.

Pic 2 Continuation.

KNYTHOS Why? Who do you know on this Earth you can tell? And who really am I?

Pic 3 Close-up of Grey smiling slightly.

Pic 4 Knythos continues talking.

KNYTHOS Anyway, we crossed paths and the way this world works is the most unusual things tend to happen for the most fortuitous reasons at the most fortuitous times. So, drafted.

GREY Fine, drafted. I assume this isn't a worldwide search so you must have her general location.

KNYTHOS Right you are. A palace, really a fortress. Capture her and bring her to me.

GREY Deal.

Pic 5 Closeups of the others looking strangely at Grey.

Pic 6 Continuation.

GREY Once done we'll be on our way.

CATHERINE Why are we humouring this man, Raymond? We could leave now, easily.

KNYTHOS No, you can't.

GREY No, we can't. He's jamming our ability to leave so we have to accept terms. We bring her we can go. Deal?

KNYTHOS Deal.

Page Three One panel

Both men shake hand in the centre of the room with the others looking at them from the edges of the room.

Page Four Nine panels (three by three)

Pic 1 A fortress, white, marble, and sitting on a balcony is the woman shown earlier, gazing out absently.

Pic 2 Grey and the others standing outside the walls of the fortress, with it in the distance.

GREY If I take some of your abilities, I can do this alone.

JAMES Why should you do this at all? I am still a tad bit confused.

GREY Do you feel it? It's in the air, like perfume.

GARIL There is something, yes, but subtle, indistinct.

GREY ***That*** is why I am doing this alone. I need your speed James and your technopathy Ren. That's it.

REN
(jokingly) Don't waste my gifts on stupidity, old man.

Pic 3 Continuation.

Grey is smiling.

GREY It's only stupid if you don't know the entire game.

Pic 4 Grey is walking toward the woman on the balcony but the blur of motion indicates he is moving faster than the eye can see.

Pic 5 He is standing behind her. He is no longer wearing his mask, revealing his face.

ILLYRIA I feel you there. Impressive. How did you bypass the sentinels?

GREY I spoke to them and they listened.

Pic 6 She turns looking closely at him.

ILLYRIA Who sent you?

GREY His name was Thomas. Do you know him?

ILLYRIA Yes. I suppose you are here to kill me?

GREY Capture, not kill.

Pic 7 Both are now standing on the balcony, looking over the greenery below.

ILLYRIA Well, I guess he is more forgiving in his old age.

GREY He is holding the only key to our leaving. Or, at least he is claiming that to be true.

ILLYRIA He drafted you.

GREY Indeed. My companions below don't know why, or what is going on.

ILLYRIA You do?

GREY He called you darling. I heard the echo of it when we arrived, the scent of his words in the electromagnetic signals he sent to you. Just you. I found that interesting.

Pic 8 Continuation.

ILLYRIA How much do you know?

GREY I know that besides you and him I can sense no human life on this planet. Oh, it has humanoid life, but not *human* life. What do you call them?

ILLYRIA The enarei. A witch species. Have you seen them yet?

GREY Not with my eyes, but yes, I've seen them.

ILLYRIA There are these vast forests beyond London where they go. They have these barbed bristles on their wrists and when they wish to reproduce, they brush them against certain black trees . . .

GREY And later their offspring hang like fruit over-ripened on the branches. I know. Without eyes, I saw them.

Pic 9 Continuation.

ILLYRIA Beyond them is nothing else, nothing left like us. The human race gone to seed except for him and me.

GREY Who were you, before?

ILLYRIA A spy. He told the truth about that. But our nations no longer exist. The enarei humour us, let us play spy for a time. He was talking about that

before he met you. He would handle the boredom of panic. Imagine being a spy, having an entire world, and no one to spy for.

Page Five Nine panels (three by three)

Pic 1 Illyria and Grey are walking out the front door.

ILLYRIA I don't suppose I could run.

GREY You could, but I'd catch you.

ILLYRIA I believe you would. Well, I guess the game is over.

GREY For now.

Pic 2 The group is gathered in Thomas' quarters, and Thomas is smiling.

KNYTHOS A great service you've done, a truly marvellous service.

GREY And the way home? You will provide it now?

KNYTHOS Of course, a man of my word and all that.

CATHERINE Raymond, what exactly are we doing?

GREY Changing the board of the game, but not the game itself.

KNYTHOS Eh?

Pic 3 Continuation.

GREY I was most curious about the pair of you, which was why I made the deal. I explained to her I could sense no other human life. And the others, the enarei, as she put it, they tolerate you, humour you. Thought I would do likewise.

KNYTHOS Eh? Whatever do you mean?

ILLYRIA He knows Thomas. He knows this is all bullshit, us playing a game with no rules and no winners. He knows.

GREY And I know you are not the one to get us home. We need to speak to the enarei. Or rather, needed to.

Pic 4 The forests outside the city. Grey walked there and beside him creatures, humanoid, violet-skinned beings, like bioluminescence, and yellow catlike eyes. Amongst them are black trees, like obsidian, everywhere.

KNYTHOS So you know, and yet you still followed the path I set out?

GREY The path I set out, and yes. Here is my deal. This world has outgrown you, both. The nations, the ideologies, they perished, didn't they? How did they perish? How did you survive? Answer my questions and receive your reward.

KNYTHOS Reward?

Pic 5 Continuation.

ILLYRIA They died when the enarei came, bleeding through reality like snow through fire. Each person was subsumed into them, except us, their skins worn over the skins of the people we knew. As fell mankind so fell everything that scaffolded our reasons to be. There is your answer.

GREY But not why you survived. I know the answer to that. I saw it when we came through. And now I will show you both. It's time for us to go home.

Pic 6 The eight of them are standing in another city and among them are countless people walking about. Some seem to have skins of silver, or gold.

CATHERINE Weren't we already here?

GREY Yeah. Welcome home.

ILLYRIA You're talking to us?

GREY He said it. That world was a speed trap. You were trapped. This is your real home.

KNYTHOS You jest.

GREY No. And now we have taken enough time and shall be on our way.

Pic 7 Continuation.

KNYTHOS Wait. I mentioned someone. Thylok. You should know about him.

GREY I know about him. Try to get used to your new world, your new year, your new life. Goodbye.

Pic 8 A desert, the seven are together again.

MORGAN I heard you did a good thing.

GREY More or less. The enarei arrived on that Earth by an accident of motion. They had no idea they caused any destruction. Can't punish someone by walking through a door and not knowing the act was an act of destruction.

MORGAN Not what I mean. Those two, you left them on Alraune's World. That was kind of you.

JAMES Kind? How do you figure that?

Pic 9 Continuation.

CATHERINE He figures that because there is no way in hell they were from there. And I find it hard to believe if they were that would have saved them.

GREY It's like he said, fortuitous reasons and fortuitous timing.

MIRANDA The enarei didn't really kill anyone, did they? Not even accidentally. You said destroyed something, not someone. What really happened on the world we left behind?

GREY It was just the year of ending things, that's all. You didn't smell it, did you? The air was filled with a tinge of something . . . unclean. And if there were no humans left what was left to stop all those weapons from corroding into danger?

Page Six One panel

The others look on in horror for a moment.

MORGAN Just how powerful were the enarei, exactly?

GREY Powerful enough to rebuild a world that only had two survivors in it, two survivors traumatized enough to pretend the world hadn't ended, yet.

MIRANDA And now they're on another world full of people both real and artificial.

GREY It'll take them forever to figure out the differences between the two. Hopefully, that will be enough time to heal their fractured minds. But what do I know?

MORGAN Everything we don't, apparently.

Story Four Life in Grey

Page One Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 A white room. Raymond Grey is sitting alone looking down at a picture of someone, a woman. He is not dressed in black but has grey clothes on.

GREY Another year, another life.

Pic 2 Grey is walking the streets of a city, quite futuristic and silver-looking. Small drones can be seen.

Pic 3 A screen in his hand and on it dozens of images of people, all different.

Pic 4 Grey is slowly putting his black clothing/armour on, his mask being last.

Pic 5 The view of the changing room becomes red through the lens of his mask and details like the size and dimensions of objects are shown in slight yellow, barely visible to the reader.

Pic 6 Grey in armour is walking the same streets, observing people all the time.

Page Two Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 Grey is walking these same streets at night, barely anyone is out.

Pic 2 Another view through his eyes, showing images similar to those seen on his phone.

Pic 3 The futuristic city seems to be asleep.

Pic 4 Grey has returned home still in armour as if he forgot to take it off.

Pic 5 Standing in armour he is staring at the same photograph as if seeing it for the first time, through his scarlet eyes.

Pic 6 Continuation.

GREY Another world, another year, another life.

Page Three Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 Grey is lying on his bed, eyes open, staring up. He is no longer wearing his armour.

GREY There is something haunting me.

Pic 2 Continuation.

GREY There is someone haunting me.

Pic 3 Grey is walking the same streets.

GREY (v. o.) I can look through every image made by man. As an officer of the law, it is my purpose to pour through the minutia of other people's lives, to find the secrets they keep, assuming they hide ill intent.

Pic 4 Grey is sitting in what looks to be a massive library, sunlight pouring across the book he is reading now.

GREY (v. o.) And because of this quality of introspection, there has not been a murder in this city in seven years. I know there hasn't. Because I was there when the last murder occurred.

Pic 5 The book he is reading can be seen now. It is the woman, a woman who looks similar to Catherine Fields. Or, rather it is a collection of images devoted entirely to her.

GREY (v. o.) We catalogue the dead like driftwood here, each row of books a life devoted by its ending. Out of all of them, I still come to her. I know her name, her age, every second of her life until it ended. What I don't remember is our time together. I know we had time together. I can see the cameras and through their eyes, I know. However . . .

Pic 6 Another book he is looking at, showing his own face and the various parts of his own life, from childhood to adulthood.

GREY (v. o.) The injuries I sustained caused severe memory loss. I can only stare at my life second-hand.

Pic 6 Grey is on patrol in the empty streets again.

GREY (v. o.) Sometimes I think I will never truly live again . . .

Page Four One panel

Grey is surrounded by bright blue light as he seems to pass cleanly through the ground.

GREY (v. o.) But sometimes the universe can be kind . . .

Page Five Nine panels (three by three)

Pic 1 Grey in his armour is lying on the ground. Morgan is standing over him.

MORGAN I have no idea who you are but I suspect you are a kind man.

GREY That's gratifying. I hardly know myself. My name's Grey.

MORGAN Morgan. Tell me, do you know where we are?

Pic 2 The two men are standing in what looks to be the ruins of an ancient city.

GREY No idea. I can't detect any familiar signals.

MORGAN And I can't hear the thoughts of my countrymen.

GREY You telepathic?

MORGAN I am, and clearly you're not. We need to figure out where we are and what happened to us.

Pic 3 Three other figures approach, Catherine, Miranda and Garil.

GARIL Who goes there?

MORGAN You first.

CATHERINE It's clear we're in unusual circumstances.

Pic 4 Catherine raises her hands as a sign of friendship.

CATHERINE My name is Catherine Fields and these are Miranda Greaves and Garil Craesarn. We arrived here hours ago. We don't know where we are. Now . . . who are you?

Pic 5 Seemingly hours later, since it was darker before and now the sun has risen.

GREY That's all we know.

GARIL The world you described, it's not like ours. Nor the one you described Morgan.

MORGAN I can see your world through your eyes. I know.

MIRANDA What I don't understand is how we are all using the same language. If the worlds are so different language would change too.

GREY Not only that. We're all breathing the same air, look relatively the same despite originating from different Earths, and even our names are comparative. Morgan, Catherine . . .

GARIL Garil?

GREY Not common, but not unheard of.

CATHERINE I have to admit you seem to be taking this well.

MORGAN We're all taking this *too well*.

Pic 6 Continuation.

GARIL He's right. Why aren't we panicking or screaming? Why are we so calm?

GREY I think it's because of me. I felt something when I passed through, maybe you felt it too.

Pic 7 Closeup of Catherine's face.

CATHERINE Like a wave, like this calming wave drifting over us. You think that was you?

GREY Is me. On my Earth my technology lets me scan, analyze, absorb information, but I've been changed. I feel connected to each of you, tapped into you, and maybe you're tapped into me too.

Pic 8 Morgan sitting on a stone near them, as if deep in thought.

MORGAN I sense it too, like tendrils boring through us, radiating from Grey. But that leaves the question why aren't you panicking?

GREY I don't know. I was . . . sleeping in my world, but the longer I've been here the more fragments I've felt from when I was awake. It's like a sea of fragments boiling beneath my skin but as I grasp each one it cools like ice, cooling me too.

Pic 9 Miranda is standing apart from the group, idly examining part of a ruined building.

MIRANDA All this is interesting, but we need a plan. This place is old, decaying and dead. If there was human life here it's gone. We were all brought to this place, well, where do we go from here?

Page Six Nine panels (three by three)

Pic 1 Closeup of Grey's face.

GREY This world may be ruined but human life is here. If we were brought here, it implies there is a threshold we crossed, like from one room to another. I can't imagine there was only a single threshold though. We need to keep looking. The sun's risen and we don't know how hot it gets here. We need to pick a direction and fan out, exploring as we go.

Pic 2 The group prepares to move deeper into the city.

GARIL Are we defaulting to your leadership?

GREY No. We are defaulting to common sense and this time I had it. Next time it might be you.

GARIL Good point.
(matter-of-fact.)

Pic 3 James Moran is in a large gallery, his sword drawn. It is partly in shadow and he appears prepared to fight.

JAMES I feel you there. Sense you. Come out, let me see the last man in the world.

Pic 4 Ren steps out of the shadows.

REN So close, so wrong.

Pic 5 James sheathes his sword.

JAMES You're not from here.

REN Nor you. Who are you?

JAMES James Moran, at your service.

REN Ren Ushima Ya . . . Ren Ushima.

JAMES Any idea where we are or how we got here?

REN Trans-dimensional door was perceived to close seven hours ago, but not before linking at least seven alternate realities together, coalescing to this point. Not certain why.

JAMES And you know this how?

REN Tehnopathic. I feel machinery, sense them, listen to them and speak to them.

Pic 6 Continuation.

JAMES So this gate was artificial?

REN No, it wasn't, but the machinery here, the remnants of it picked up the signal and carried it forward in time to where we are now, and that's what I sensed.

JAMES What do you mean forward in time?

REN Whatever brought us here happened more than a century ago. It just took that long for us to arrive. The memories of whatever opened the door lingered in these machines we're surrounded by.

JAMES You said the door shut seven hours ago.

REN It did, but it was opened a century before that, and we were carried in the wake of it.

Pic 7 Continuation.

JAMES Does that mean a century passed on our own worlds?

REN I don't know. Time is a fickle thing. A moving target. All I know is it took a long time for us to be here, and I don't why.

Pic 8 Sounds from outside are heard and both turn their heads as if hearing it.

JAMES Perhaps we're not alone after all.

REN Hopefully whoever out there is as friendly as we are.

Pic 9 James draws his sword.

JAMES I should only hope. Let's go.

Page Seven Nine panels (three by three)

Pic 1 James and Ren are standing outside an immense building with several spires rising into the sky as the others approach.

JAMES Who goes there?

MORGAN We did that already, you missed it.

GREY I am Raymond Grey and we were brought here against our wills.

REN Same.

JAMES I am James Moran and this is Ren Ushima.

MIRANDA That's nice. We're trying to find a way to leave. Got any ideas?

REN Actually yes, now that you're here.

Pic 2 Everyone turns to look at Ren.

MIRANDA I was just making small talk. Are you serious?

REN Always. Come inside and I can explain.

Pic 3 They are all standing before a massive piece of machinery, gold in colour with dials and buttons on it, most of them broken.

REN This is what recorded the door opening.

MORGAN It's broken.

REN It's asleep. I heard its dreams.

MORGAN Should I worry about you?

GREY Let her keep talking Morgan. Go on.

Pic 4 Continuation.

REN As I was saying in its dreams, I heard it and I heard the doors opening and closing. With your technology I can re-activate this device and using its awareness of the doors plot a course somewhere adjacent here.

GARIL Assuming you can, will that get us home?

REN Problem is we're from distinctly different worlds. I have to choose one and go from there first. And I don't know what caused this in the first place so I don't know what dangers we face if we cross the threshold again.

CATHERINE So this is home for some of us and not others?

REN I can't even be certain we'll hit the right Earth if I just aim for one. Seven doors opened but counting it out we're from five Earths. That's two unaccounted for I don't have an answer for.

Pic 5 Continuation.

MIRANDA Doesn't that just mean more people came here? We're not alone?

GREY No. I can see farther now, a lot farther. This Earth is dead. No one came here except us and no one left this world either. It's like this entire world was left in the path of the doors, like a trap. Don't know why.

JAMES Seven possibilities, one choice. I'm game. And as for traps, if this is one

it's poorly made. This feels like an afterthought. Make a choice Ren, let's roll the dice and see what happens.

Pic 6 The three cybernetic beings embed limbs and wires into the machinery, bringing it to life.

GREY (v. o.) The four of them worked for days while James explored the world. His speed was unprecedented. Never knew a man could run like that. He even claimed he once ran on the sun, but I'm almost sure he was lying. *Almost.*

Pic 7 Closeup of James' face, normal, running, searching, but otherwise healthy.

Pic 8 James running across the vast deserts like a blur.

JAMES (v. o.) Ren and the others figured out the machinery and the guiding hand of where next to go. I spent my time running, learning more and more about this world, until . . .

Pic 9 Closeup of James, his face ashen.

JAMES (v. o.) I made the discovery.

Page Eight Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 James is back amongst them, still looking pale and haggard.

REN James, what happened?

JAMES I know why we're here. And it's not good.

Pic 2 James is seated in a chair while Morgan, Grey and Ren cluster about a moment.

GREY What happened out there?

JAMES Found them. The others. You said this world was a trap and I didn't believe you, but you were right. Damn, I wish you were wrong.

Pic 3 The other three glance up and stare at him now.

CATHERINE What did you find out there?

JAMES A sea of fragments, that's what. That's what you said before, right? How you were coming together all the time?

GREY Yeah, I did say that, so?

JAMES I found the sea. I found the fragments. I know why it took a century for us to arrive. It took that long to get it right.

Pic 4 A circle of blue light can be seen in the room as the seven vanish.

JAMES (v. o.) We left that afternoon, going anywhere but here. If not for Grey we might have committed suicide knowing what we did.

Pic 5 A partial view of the desert, with just on the edge what looks at first to be a black smear, right hand side.

GREY (v. o.) Something was haunting me. Someone was haunting me, but I guess that now belongs to another man. We left that afternoon, not once looking back. Ren understood what happened. She said the process to bring us had resulted in echoes being created and discarded and reformed, time after time until enough discarded pieces were left to finish us, fashion us into being . . .

Pic 6 The sea can be seen now, endless broken copies of Grey and the others, some missing parts of their faces, or limbs, some no more than just pieces of faces scattered on top of each other.

GREY (v. o.) But the extra copies still had to go somewhere. So they were left lying on the sand, mingled together like bits of driftwood mired into stone. Sometimes I think my soul is still there, and I am haunting something. I am haunting someone in another world, in another year, in another life.

Story Five Demons

Page One Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 A city much like the one they left but fully inhabited and filled with people. One in particular with short red hair is standing at the gates of the city, looking out upon the desert beyond.

Pic 2 Another woman, older, with dark hair approaches. Jane is her name.

JANE Jal, what means you to stand here and wait?

JAL I sense something on the horizon. Feel it nestling into my bones. It is coming. But I know not what it is.

JANE The council believes Beatrice is trying something new to send against us. Could it be *that* you are feeling?

JAL Aye, it could be. It could be.

Pic 3 In a sealed room, a chamber of gold, a man is waiting, suspended from the ceiling by his wrists. His name is Thylok.

THYLOK Will you not let me die?

A woman is standing before him. She is dressed in military garb. Her name is Beatrice and she is the ruler of this nation.

BEATRICE Not yet, Thylok. This is the last experiment. After you have been made a useful instrument your death is guaranteed, and by tomorrow the nation of Fremyre will cease to exist. As will you, as I promised.

Pic 4 She leaves, the door closing behind her.

BEATRICE Begin the process. Make me a weapon. No. Make him a weapon, for me.
(As leaving)

Pic 5 The room fills with blue light and suddenly he seems to be torn apart, his body shredded into fragments like those composed of Grey and company.

Pic 6 Darkness.

THYLOK (v. o.) This was the day of my death.

Page Two Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 Grey and company can be seen at the edges of the same city as shown on page one. Jal is no longer there but it is clear that the city is intact, with golden buildings and spires, not the ruined remnants they came from.

GREY Where do you think we are?

MIRANDA Does anything here seem familiar to you?

MORGAN If you're asking if this is home to any of us I'm going to say no.

Pic 2 Miranda is seen bent down, looking at the sand.

MIRANDA ***This*** is familiar.

GARIL What do you mean?

MIRANDA Look.

Pic 3 Catherine and Garil are also bent, staring at the sand.

CATHERINE Cybernetic components, nanite-replication security lattices, hunter-seeker probes embedded in the ground. This whole desert should be impossible to cross without dying.

JAMES And yet we manage. Shall we go in?

GREY You go James. Use your speed to check the city first, then come back.

JAMES Back in a sec.

Pic 4 James seen throughout the city all at once, as a latticework of blurs.

Pic 5 James is back in their company.

JAMES It's inhabited and the people seem friendly.

GREY Then let's go in and say hello.

Pic 6 As they move into the city the position is from above, the reader looking at them from above, walking forward, up the page with a top view of the circular walls of the golden city and behind them a ways, something else. A footstep, one larger than the entire city, from afar can be seen.

Page Three Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 Jal can be seen across the desert, walking. She is alone, wearing silvery armour but her face

and head are uncovered.

Pic 2 Before her is an army of pale figures, armed with spears and the like.

Pic 3 Jal addresses them.

JAL How many times have you marched the sands of death, have you perished in seas of wires? We are not your enemy so long as you leave us be. You cannot prevail. Give up and live!

Pic 4 Jal suddenly rises in the air and her eyes are now blazing with yellow light.

JAL Your queen Beatrice has led you on a suicide march. Pray your end be merciful and peaceful, in the moments left you.

Pic 5 A blast of blue energy can be seen in the distance.

JAL What the devil be that?

Pic 6 In the distance a form can be seen, a massive skeletal form rising miles into the air, not levitating but growing to the height of several miles up. As this is happening Beatrice can be seen coming toward the front of the army.

BEATRICE Your death, that is your death little one. Finally, have I found my instrument.

Page Four Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 Grey and company have walked through the city, behind them many people, all women, most of them red-haired. They are coming toward the center which is a palace much like the one they encountered on the dead world.

GREY Strange, almost like xylemers here.

CATHERINE Xylemers? What are they?

GREY On my Earth there are humans and xylemers. They're another species.

MIRANDA Like the enarei.

GREY Similar but different. Xylemers are both male and female. They arrived on my Earth many centuries ago, from elsewhere. The people here remind me a little of them.

Pic 2 At the gates of the palace they stop and Jane emerges to meet them.

JANE Greetings strangers. Welcome to the nation of Fremyre.

GREY We apologize for intruding upon you.

JANE No intrusion. You were expected Mr. Grey.

GREY By whom?

JANE By he who sent for you of course. Come in. Allow me to explain.

Pic 3 The skeletal form can clearly be seen. Jal seems terrified to face this but stubbornly refuses to run.

JAL I know not what you've done but I made no oath to flee. I'll not flee now, nor even in the face of death.

BEATRICE Then behold death's face.

Pic 4 The giant is near Jal now, staring down at her. It is Thylok.

JAL Speak demon, say your peace. If today is my day of rest I'll labour hard before it comes.

THYLOK In another world, in another year, in another life, perhaps.

Pic 5 Thylok turns down to look upon Beatrice and her army.

BEATRICE Why are you stopping? You are my creature! I have placed in you the path of your life. You can see all time spread before you and the shape of that life I have made in you! You have seen that you shall kill her and from there exterminate Fremyre! Do it! Do as destiny commands!

Pic 6 Thylok turns back to Jal.

THYLOK I am a puppet who sees the strings and by seeing them ***I cut them.***

Page Five Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 The seven are gathered in a gallery with Jane Aabb among them.

JANE He told us you would come Mr. Grey. You and the others.

GREY And who is he?

JANE His name was Mithridates Thylok.

JAMES Was?

JANE He died in Ameriya, but death was denied him. Fashioned as a weapon by the ruler of that nation, meant to exterminate us all.

Pic 2 Continuation.

GREY He failed?

JANE He rebelled.

Pic 3 Back to the plains and the skeletal giant who is now on fire, a green bright emerald fire which is licking about him with demons embedded in the flames.

THYLOK To those about to die, I salute you. To she who shall taste oblivion
. . . my contempt.

Pic 4 He turns his left hand down and suddenly flame licks from it, incinerating the entire army, Beatrice alone surviving, or seeming to.

Pic 5 Slow motion of her turning into a pillar of salt and being swept away, still conscious and aware even as she is slipping into oblivion.

Pic 6 The giant peers at Jal.

THYLOK I have no quarrel with you or yours. But I am owed a debt for my benevolence.

JAL Name it and if it is my power I grant it. If not, your debts be unfulfilled. I will not promise what I cannot deliver, not even to death itself.

THYLOK Brave to the last. I appreciate that. My debt is in words alone. A message you shall give your master and she shall give a man. Beyond this, I ask nothing more of you.

Page Six Nine panels (three by three)

Pic 1 Back to the palace and Jane speaking.

JANE After he killed Beatrice he returned to his homeland and obliterated everything before departing. But on the battlefield, he told our protector of you, and when you would arrive, and why.

GREY How did he know? And who exactly is he?

JANE Thylok was one of Beatrice's experiments. She stripped the man of his tether to reality, the confining nature of dimension, of time, and yet left a leash about him, implanting a future she wanted to see. Thylok exists outside of time Mr. Grey, and she imagined as a result he would have no means of altering the future she gave him. That was not to be.

Pic 2 Thylok standing alone upon the plains littered with dead bodies like the fragments of the fragmented sea, while a vast circular pattern of blue stands before him.

JANE (v. o.) He decided to do opposite of what he saw. No idea how, but perhaps it was simply the force of his will or his hate. Or perhaps it was you.

GREY (v. o.) Me?

Pic 3 Thylok has stepped through and now stands upon what seems an infinite web of silvery strands in infinite blackness, yet he is likewise standing before an image of a white room, and of Grey sitting on his bed.

JANE (v. o.) He told Jal that he felt something pricking at the back of his mind when he was a man and that this continued after his demise. He felt fragments of another life bearing down on him. When she died . . . the woman in the photograph, and you were injured, parts of your life went slipping through the underside of reality, the underspace below the foundations of our worlds. It ended up in his head. Or so he said.

Pic 4 Thylok is now standing in the ruined city Grey and company visited before. Another door opens and he is gone again but the circular blue pattern remains, right where Grey and company are going to be.

Pic 5 Back to the palace and Jane speaking.

JANE When he left, he left scattered pieces of himself behind, which I suppose is what dragged you down and through those same underspaces to where you happen now to be. Talking to me. As he said you'd be.

GREY This Thylok, where is he now?

JANE I have no earthly idea where he is. I only know he had no quarrel with my kind and though he obliterated his homeland the survivors, those I guess he considered innocent, he left behind. We've been taking care of them since. I suppose he knew we would.

JAMES All that's well and good but does this get us home by any chance? Any mention of that?

JANE Ever the fixated. Yes, he mentioned how *you* would go home, Mr. Moran.

Pic 6 Continuation.

JAMES Me? Singular?

JANE You, singular. From there I have no idea what happens to you. But Thylok was adamant from here you would go home, Mr. Moran. Dragging your companions with you in your wake. As for after . . . didn't say.

REN No other message?

JANE One other message, but intended only for your ears Ms. *Ya* . . .

Pic 7 Grey has turned to leave, the others following, except for James and Ren.

GARIL Where pray tell are we going?

GREY Away from the message meant only for Ren. Come on James, you too.

JAMES I stay. After all, if Thylok knows all he knows I would stay, just as he knows you would leave.

JANE James can stay, but the others leave. *Must* leave.

MIRANDA We're going, we're going, predestination paradoxes are not worth worrying about.

Pic 8 The others have now left, except for James, Ren and Jane.

REN What is the message?

JANE To Ms. Ren Ushima Yagami, in payment for the life of Raymond Grey I decided a debt needed be paid. Knowing the nature of your world decided to visit it next. I apologize for not taking you with me but knowing the nature of your world decided you wouldn't want to go until after my exorcism of the place. The way for you will be clear on the day you confess your love to him you love. If I am right, he is standing here. If wrong is standing elsewhere. Even gods can err, so I leave the choice as yours.

REN That was the full message?

JANE Verbatim. Jal has eidetic memory, and it is hard to forget the words of Mithridates Thylok when he makes a speech.

Pic 9 Continuation.

REN So my world will be exorcised by him. Is that a good thing, do you think?

JANE I hardly know, and do not care. The debt was to deliver the message, not care about its contents. Now be off for the following move is his and

Grey's both. From here Mr. Moran will have an excellent view of his home. Beyond this, the further path is concealed from all of us.

JAMES We will leave, but first a small question. We arrived in a city much like this, but ruined and lifeless. Was that the shadow of what will be, or was it an alternate world similar and different from this one?

JANE Neither I am afraid. It was a possibility, an unfinished place just as the message he told is unfinished. In one second, you are the man she loves, in another you are a stranger, and both realities exist until only one dominates. What you saw was this world in the split second between Thylok embracing his destiny and rejecting it. It was a door half closed, showing only a shadow of what lay on the other side.

Page Seven Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 Moran and Ren have joined the others as the circular blue light appears before them.

Pic 2 Jal has come beside Jane in the golden gallery.

JAL Do you think they will reach their homes?

JANE I know not. But Grey and Thylok are entangled together, now and always, and wherever Grey goes or has gone the steps were laid out beforehand by Thylok. As for who laid out the steps for Thylok, was it always Grey.

Pic 3 Thylok is sitting at an outdoor café, looking as he did before, as a normal human being, sipping tea in a Japanese city, much like Tokyo might be. About him cluster countless demonic creatures, horned and monstrous-looking. People are running in terror while he sits comfortably. He is staring up, gazing idly at the beasts marching toward him.

THYLOK I grant you a moment to prepare to meet your god. Nothing more.

Pic 4 The demons are but inches from Thylok now.

DEMON Who are you to challenge us, without fear? This world is ours now and always, these people our lawful prey. The contracts are made, the deals struck. The people of this world signed their souls to us.

Pic 5 Continuation.

THYLOK Then allow me to change the contract, in my favour, and therefore in
(smiling) theirs.

Pic 6 Thylok is now again his skeletal form and all the other demons save the one speaking are gone. The demon has turned behind him, seeing no one else there.

DEMON Where have they gone?

THYLOK I *ate* them, little demon. I *devoured* them as sun devours frost. Now about the contracts you made when you bled into this world like worms into driftwood. It is hard to make a fair deal when you press a foot upon a throat, as you did in coming here and cursing humanity to pain and suffering and want, and then promising to take the pain away, only for a greater suffering later. So let me renegotiate the deal. I promise you oblivion and in exchange, I get what I want from you, which is oblivion. Fair, simple, *painless*.

DEMON *What are you?*

THYLOK I told you. *It is time to meet your god.* The game has changed little demon. The king of all is playing now, he who was, who is, who shall be. Pray to me that I be merciful. Or don't. It is not pray which dictates reality. *It is me, and reality is mine to do with as I wish.*

Page Eight One panel

Complete blackness, except for the sounds of screaming.

Story Six War Fields

Page One Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 A vast battlefield, grey and brown, wires everywhere, trenches dug into the ground like worms burrowing through driftwood. Upon the battlefield are several armies, fighting from the trenches.

Pic 2 A massively large man is now standing upon the fields, dressed in French military garb. He appears obese and is standing at least ten feet tall.

Pic 3 In a moment he is flying through the air toward the opposing side.

Pic 4 Scene of this man tearing through the German side, ripping apart machine guns and men like tissue paper.

Pic 5 Another man appears, dressed in German garb. The large man, Hurant Vachod, stands facing Draden Rorque, who is dark-haired and dressed in grey.

HURANT Monsieur, let us see who shall win, and who shall die?

DRADEN Let's do.

Pic 6 The two men can be seen from without, as below them in the ground a circle can be seen, indicating mass, or weight, which shows Hurant's has become almost nothing, while Rorque's has increased.

DRADEN You cannot win now.

HURANT No, I suspect not. But then . . .

Page Two Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 Across where Hurant came from others have arrived.

HURANT I was only the distraction.

DRADEN Shit.

Pic 2 In the following battle Draden is forced to flee, pursued by men who will be mentioned later.

Pic 3 The same battlefield, but healed by now. Grey and company arrive upon it.

GREY Where are we? Is this your home?

JAMES I believe, yes, it is. Though the year is wrong. We are standing in a future time.

Pic 4 A man approaches them. The same man from the earlier battle. His name is Matthias Latherton, British officer, and though he is older it is still clearly him.

MATTHIAS James Moran, I presume?

JAMES You presume well, and who might you be?

MATTHIAS Matthias Latherton, a king of the world.

MIRANDA We seem to always be in the presence of royalty.

CATHERINE Drawn like moths to a flame they are. Maybe it's our magnetic personalities.

MATTHIAS Or perhaps it is because you arrive where you are sent by forces which make kings seem paupers.

GREY What do you want?

Pic 5 Continuation.

MATTHIAS James Moran, brother of Sebastian Moran, exiled from our dominion, returned to our dominion, welcome home.

GREY Brother of Sebastian Moran? ***The*** Sebastian Moran?

JAMES How many Sebastians do you know?

GREY One, and related to him another James, whose last initial is also M.

MATTHIAS And related to him in opposition to his villainy another who I suspect you also know.

JAMES
(interrupting) Be that as it may, I am here, what do you want now that I have returned?

MATTHIAS Come and I will show you.

Pic 6 So saying they left, following him.

Page Three Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 Berlin, but not a city of bricks and cobbled streets but silvery, with great towers of glass. They are walking through it.

MATTHIAS One of the capitals of the world. How do you like it?

JAMES A fine city but as I am out of time with it it is no better than a stranger world to me.

GARIL How far in the future are we from the time James lived here?

MATTHIAS Forty years have passed since you slipped away. You disappeared during the Last Great War. Do you recall it?

JAMES I do. When did it end?

MATTHIAS A year after it began. Due to the influence of men as I.

Pic 2 The group are gathered in a large chamber and with them is Hurant, John Molyneux who is an older black man, Edmund Baydrake with his grey hair, and a woman, Lila Modescu, who seems younger than the others, though still about 40. Though she is in good shape for forty.

MATTIAS Behold some of the kings of the world.

MIRANDA Hey kings. Why are we here and when can *we* go home?

LILA You must be Miranda. He told us you were a bit impatient.

GREY Thylok, right?

MATTHIAS Thylok. Right.

Pic 3 A view of the world, one filled with technological marvels, zeppelins and airships in the skies, silvery roads with futuristic machines rolling across it.

MATTHIAS (v. o.) He found us after we'd made this world a utopia. Said he was impressed by all we had achieved. In our world, all were given a gift or two. No doubt you've wondered where came James' speed, but he always had it, just as I have always had my own gifts. These gifts we used during the Last Great War and realizing we could have ended the world we ended the war instead.

Pic 4 Thylok is standing in the middle of one of these streets, looking like a human being. Matthias just passes by.

Pic 5 Back in the room with everyone.

MATTHIAS He told me about where James went and how getting James back would benefit us. And here you are, and here we are, and the benefits lay just within our grasp.

GREY What benefits do you refer?

MATTHIAS You wish to go home, do you not?

MIRANDA No, we wish to stay here and listen to you some more.

Pic 6 Continuation,

MATTHIAS
(smiling) Your sarcasm is refreshing. And you will go home, all of you, in payment of your future deeds.

GREY What deeds?

LILA As you pass through the doors between, worlds will become fixed, letting us through as well. Permanent thresholds for us to cross between.

JAMES Wait? You intend to go where they are from?

MATTHIAS It is the most logical way to extend our influence, is it not? You came from our past you know what our world was like. Now it is paradise, and as we go forth, we may help make paradises of other Earths as well.

GARIL Provided those other worlds desire it.

HURANT Who would not desire a paradise?

GREY Assuming this world is one.

MATTHIAS Thylok told me about you, all of you, and when you'd come. Now you are here, and we have the means to open the doors to your homes and carry you with us into paradise. Is that not desirable *enough?*

Page Four Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 We return to the battleground with the men fighting. Edmund Baydrake has taken a rifle and is aiming at several men, who all die with one bullet. At the same time Molyneux is by him, touching his shoulder, and part of the scene is shown from his point of view, creating intense Close-ups for Edmund to use and see through. Matthias' touch has caused several soldiers to succumb and seem to dissolve while Draden is joined by another man with red hair, Sigurd Ryhelt, who is standing directly before Matthias, as if daring to challenge him.

Pic 2 The two men fight, Ryhelt avoiding Latherton's blows as Lila's hand appears from nowhere behind Ryhelt's head.

Pic 3 Lila has struck Ryhelt knocking him down as the battle ends.

Pic 4 Latherton reaches down with his hand for Ryhelt to stand.

Pic 5 Ryhelt reaches up and Matthias helps me stand.

Pic 6 The survivors look about as if finally realizing the destruction they have caused.

Page Five Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 We return to the room and the gathered heroes. Grey is looking to James.

GREY A paradise is only desirable in comparison to what came before and what comes after. We've seen what came after so what came before?

JAMES Before the Last War there were various nations, empires in competition, murders, deaths, and battles. I was there during the Last War and I was there before. Vast industrial cities, machines bleeding oil and coal. Smell of burning flesh, and crime and criminals and master crimes, and master criminals. Can't say I really miss the old days but we haven't seen enough of the new world to make judgement on it. Haven't seen the sorts of criminals we have here yet. Not yet at least. Not yet.

MIRANDA How would you take us home if you can't open the door without us?

MATTHIAS You are like instruments, your bodies attuned to the worlds you originate. Without you what music can be made? And as for criminals Mr. Moran, there haven't been any in thirty years.

Pic 2 Continuation.

GREY How did you manage that?

MATTHIAS When minds and bodies of great strength are attuned to a common task of grace even the soul can be autopsied and operated on Mr. Grey. The talented can always uplift the less talented and what is a criminal but a less talented soul?

GREY On my Earth all eyes are turned to all and so criminals are always easier to see. But being seen is not the same as being understood. And even being watched a criminal can still commit a crime.

LILA After the Last Great War we reasoned it better that man would be incapable of criminal act, for what is war if not murder writ large?

Pic 3 Closeup of Morgan's face.

MORGAN All this is interesting but doesn't really matter. I don't really care about debates or divisions or philosophies. Grey can see what is, but I can see what isn't. And what I see ***I do not like.*** This world is yours and out of the miseries wrought you made this choice. Be that as it may. You claim gifts have elevated you. Fine. Be that as it may. We were summoned by Thylok and cast across worlds like spindrift. Be that as it may. But unless you wish a second Last Great War you will realize being gifted is not the same as being wise, and imagining a battlefield you fought on is not the same as imagining war fields our worlds have bred. So, come and let me show you exactly what you are desiring. ***Be that as it may.***

Page Six Nine panels (three by three)

Pic 1 All of them are standing upon a field, much like the war fields during the war. Matthias seems confused.

MATTHIAS Where are we?

MORGAN About half a league from the capital of my world. Look. *Look up.* I think you will find this interesting.

Pic 2 In the skies dark clouds are seen.

GARIL What is that? Morgan, where have you taken us?

GREY We're in his mindscape Garil. This is a racial memory, an echo of a former time thousands, tens of thousands of years ago.

MORGAN Exactly. You mentioned the Last Grey War Mr. Latherton. Well, let me show you my people's Last Great War.

Pic 3 In the dark clouds can be seen thousands of enormous batlike creatures, each one easily six or seven feet tall, with wings easily twenty feet across.

MATTHIAS (v. o.) What are they?

MORGAN (v. o.) Berserkers, Mr. Latherton, My people called them berserkers.

Pic 4 Suddenly the entire swarm is upon the group and they are surrounded, almost drowning in seas of wings and talons and fangs, Matthias and his group screaming while the others seem unharmed.

Pic 5 Then just as suddenly they are back in the room where it all began.

MATTHIAS What did I just experience?

MORGAN That was a real war Mr. Latherton, one not fought in a year but centuries. Hundreds of years of battling those creatures, billions slaughtered in cities much like your own. But in the end we prevailed. Care to see another battleground? Garil, Catherine, Miranda, care if I show them yours?

GARIL If you can then do so. We have no secrets here.

Pic 6 Another world, one partly in silver, with metallic animals and partly mechanical people walking about on a field much like the battleground from earlier. Violence is about to commence. The groups are seen here too.

MORGAN These were the Silver Wars. This is about a century ago so they have made improvements technologically since then.

Pic 7

The battle continues, one man, in particular, can be seen with mechanical hands, palms out before him. Clearly, it is producing an effect as his opponents have their hands over their ears, writhing in pain.

Pic 8 A woman can be seen and from her body extends square wirelike formations, catching several people around her. It is not the outlines of cubes, each one no larger than a foot across, extending thirty feet.

Pic 9 The people caught in the wake of this break apart as if cut by a thousand knives. The group is still there, watching.

MORGAN We should be going now. This wasn't even the worst battle. If we stay longer, it will give you nightmares.

Page Seven Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 They have returned to the white rooms again.

MATTHIAS How many died?

MORGAN Too many. *Always* too many.

Pic 2 Another Close-up of Morgan's face but Latherton's face can be seen too.

MORGAN You can come with us and go where we go. If to go is to pay your debt, fine. We go, you come with us. But you are not going into this blind Mr. Latherton, you are going with eyes opened, fully seeing the wreck and ruin that will come of treating our worlds as mere provinces waiting to be folded into your dominion. And I haven't shown you Grey's world yet. Though I needn't have to. Imagine a trillion eyes bearing down on you, peering down into the depths of your souls every second of every day.

You think a war is fought with stone and steel but the war of seeing, of being seen . . . that would end you Mr. Latherton. ***Press us no further if you value your sanity.***

Pic 3 Continuation, now with Matthias speaking.

MATTHIAS And so we press the matter no further. We honour your debt to us as you honour our debt to you. The doors will be opened, you may leave, and we will not attempt any further . . . ***intrusion*** into your lives. Be that as it may.

Pic 4 Closeup of Grey now speaking.

GREY You may come with us since Thylok knew you would wish it, but our wish is that we go as friends. It is no more complex a deal than that. Whatever reason he had in coming here the outcome should be mutually beneficial to all. Can't you see ***that*** as a better outcome than conquest?

Pic 5 Closeup of Matthias.

MATTHIAS I can and do. You have my word. Come, you may leave in an hour. We may follow, leaving our weapons behind us as we go.

Pic 6 Grey and company stand before another circular pattern of blue, passing through, Matthias and company behind, as if waiting to follow.

Story Seven Home Bound

Page One Nine panels (three by three)

Pic 1 Grey's city again, with Grey and company now walking the streets.

CATHERINE So, this is your world?

GREY Yeah. I'm home.

Pic 2 The whole city can be seen, the spires and towers of glass and in the air can be seen winged beings flying, while for a moment the shadow of Thylok as a giant can be seen.

Pic 3 Matthias is now standing just behind them, walking up to them.

MATTHIAS So, this is your world? Am I being watched?

GREY Everyone is being watched. That is the point of living here. But the limits of being seen extend only to this world, not yours. If you go back the way you came you will remain unseen.

MATTHIAS No, I think I can tolerate a little moment of being under glass. Besides, your friend was right. Being in command of a world breeds arrogance enough to imagine I know all worlds. Our worlds are joined Mr. Grey, not just mine to yours, but Catherine's, Ren's . . .

Pic 4 Closeup of Ren's face.

REN My world too? I wonder how it is.

MATTHIAS Hurant is there now. He says it is quite peaceful, that there was a battle of some kind which ended. I suspect it was Thylok who ended it.

Pic 5 Ren and James are standing to one side.

REN I need to see it. I need to go back.

JAMES Let me go with you.

REN Yes, yes, we should go . . .

MORGAN You know I can see what is not, can see the gaps in things by their absence. Was there not something you needed to do before leaving?

Pic 6 Continuation.

JAMES Time is not fixed, my friend. Who says when a thing should be?

REN Let's go.

Pic 7 Ren and James depart in a circle of blue.

MORGAN I'm sure she was supposed to mention something about love before she went.

GREY Love can be seen in countless forms Morgan. A word is just one geography of it, not the totality. Let's go and see the world to come. Which I suppose is just another kind of love.

MIRANDA I find that very doubtful, but what the hell?

MORGAN I think that may very well be the entire philosophy of the infinite realities.

MIRANDA Probably.

Pic 8 Thylok as an ordinary man walking toward them.

GARIL What I want to know is what was Thylok's point to all this? If he was as powerful as Jane claimed he could have done anything he wanted. Why drag all of us about like pieces on a board?

GREY Because we aren't the pieces he wanted, only the impressions of them Garil. If he is me then who are you? I think he had to pry us out of our realities to get the people he wanted slightly out of sync with theirs. It's only a theory but it's a good one.

Pic 9 The two men pass by each other, neither acknowledging the other.

GREY Yes, I suspect if we could see him now and ask him that's exactly what he'd say for the reasons he did anything. We were just shadows of people he wanted and the steps he took to bring us together are the steps he'll take to get companions of his own.

CATHERINE If so, where does that leave us?

GREY Here and everywhere I guess, just like the rest of the human race.

Story Eight When She Wept

Page One Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 Thylok is standing in a dark city which seems strangely distorted. About him are people, some with half their heads collapsed inward, so that one side of their faces doesn't exist, others have arms or legs paper thin, etc.

Pic 2 He walks about and above the streets are massive spiders, themselves paper thin, walking the rooftops, each one half as large as he was when he was a giant.

Pic 3 Thylok enters a shop or pub or both and walks toward a chair and table where someone is sitting. It is a woman with long red hair, dressed in black and her feet can clearly be seen, which are flattened and elongated unnaturally. Let us call her Rose.

ROSE Mr. Thylok, I hadn't expected you here.

THYLOK I come as I wish and I wished to be here.

Pic 4 He sits down, facing the reader, Black Rose obscured now.

ROSE So what games shall we play, now that you are able?

THYLOK No games my dear. I came to chat. To tell you where I've been and all the things I've seen.

Pic 5 Close-up of her face.

ROSE Rare for you. I had thought after our last encounter you would hold a grudge.

THYLOK That was another man, living in another world, living in another year, living in another life. Since my first crossings through the layers of reality, I have grown older and perhaps if I may say so, wiser.

ROSE So, where have you been, going to and fro throughout the layers of existence, my friend?

Pic 6 A view of a dark, radioactive wasteland, populated by wandering caravans of green, mutated beings.

THYLOK (v. o.) After my escape and after my time here entertaining you I realized I didn't know who I was, so I went on walkabout. I used Raymond Grey as my map, plumbing the geography of his life, using it as a lodestone to calculate my own.

Page Two Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 An underground bunker and in the cells at the lowest level of it small cages and within them, children. A girl in particular can be seen.

THYLOK (v. o.) I came across a world much like my own except in an even more broken state. The last remnants of humanity there experimented on their own children, trying to perfect such gifts as James would take as a hereditary inheritance. After my own experiences being ripped from my body and scattered across the lattice of time and space, I felt obligated to act.

Pic 2 Thylok in his skeletal form incinerates the men and women there, freeing the children, including the girl. Her name is Deirdre Andsom.

THYLOK (v. o.) Her name was Deirdre. I was caught in the orbit of her grief, her misery, a beacon of scarlet in grey waters. I liberated her and the others but I knew she would stay with me.

Pic 3 Back to the café.

THYLOK She was the first.

ROSE And what powers does she have?

THYLOK Her body cannot be destroyed, but rebuilds even from oblivion. She cannot even age.

ROSE And what happened to the world she came from?

THYLOK Humanity is extinct there. I placed the surviving children in Matthias' little kingdom at the world's end, considering his kind had far more experience with telepaths and flying people and girls immune to bullets or bombs. But Deirdre stayed with me. Is with me still. Like I said, she was the first.

ROSE Who was the second?

Pic 4 Another Earth, industrial and polluted like the world Grey and company encountered in Megalodons.

THYLOK Their names were Shialia Martin and Paltah Rhoge. She could resurrect the dead and he could commune with plants, give birth to trees in barren soil or harvest seeds from fields which never had seeds before.

Pic 5 The two, a black woman and a man with grey, almost birch-like skin, are seen creating animals and plants out of nothing upon a barren field.

Pic 6 Seen from orbit part of the industrial desert is slowly turning green.

THYLOK The peoples of that Earth feared the pair of them, feared greenery like grass fears fire. If I hadn't involved myself Shialia would have needed to resurrect herself, which you can imagine is a damned impossible task.

Page Three Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 The café.

THYLOK Two and three, respectfully.

ROSE How many are there now?

THYLOK Counting myself, nine. I collected them like pieces of worn glass on the shore, all the broken ones, people broken like myself.

ROSE Nine, not seven?

THYLOK Nine. It is not a one-to-one pairing. There are deviations. Paltah can extend himself as Catherine and Rees is as fast as Moran, and Deirdre is similar to Grey, but then so am I. Grey is not my altered twin, he is just a further branch along a tree, going back to a source that prisms our lives through the lens of our perceptions.

ROSE You've been reading since last we spoke.

Pic 2 Thylok is standing on a great desert and before him are the pages of an ancient book.

THYLOK (v. o.) My father might have navigated the infinite before he died, leaving books behind, world to world, memoirs of a man scattered and fragmented across infinity.

ROSE (v. o.) ***Might*** have navigated?

THYLOK (v. o.) It is also possible that the books and tomes I've been finding were left by myself at points further and further into the future when I had gathered more and more knowledge, sending it all back, causing my apotheosis in that mystical future time. When I shook off destiny, I did not destroy it, merely constructed a labyrinth of multiple paths, one where I walked, one where my destiny walked, separate from myself.

Pic 3 The café again.

THYLOK Shall I go on?

ROSE Of course. Please continue.

Pic 4 Another Earth, and on it in a large city a man wearing the mask of a raven. Thylok is standing above staring at him, skeletal now, and seemingly invisible.

THYLOK (v. o.) I found Guy Bentley and Morgan Rees on an Earth still in the grip of a world war. He was a superhero, she fast as James Moran, or faster.

Pic 5 A figure is flying above, dressed in white, bald-headed and wearing goggles over his eyes.

THYLOK (v. o.) There were many other heroes there, men in costumes playing at being spies, but they were outclassed by the only supers on their Earth.

Pic 6 Thylok is behind Guy as he is flying, easily keeping pace with him.

THYLOK (v. o.) They were easy to convince to leave. I simply turned all the weapons into smoke and moved all the soldiers to the moon for an afternoon tea, threw their generals onto the sun for a while, while making it clear I could withdraw the invincibility I had placed on them, if I so desired, while not eliminating their temporary immortality.

Page Four Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 The café.

THYLOK I needn't describe the scene.

ROSE How many did not accept your hospitality?

THYLOK I only had to bring one general home from the sun. The others foolishly imagined I was a hero like Bentley or Rees who played the role of good people. A role which we both know I do not follow well.

ROSE And the pair left with you after that?

THYLOK It helped that I could show them the fate awaiting them had they won the war.

Pic 2 The same man in a raven mask, dead in his apartment, his throat slashed.

THYLOK (v. o.) Costumed heroes tended not to survive after their usefulness was at an end on that Earth. Didn't need much convincing to leave with me.

Pic 3 Café.

ROSE The last three?

THYLOK One was native to Ren's world. Another native to Catherine's. The third is

native here. I'll leave him for last.

Pic 4 Ren's world, or rather a view showing the city Thylok was in and a portal leading directly to hell. Thylok is standing there and with him is a woman dressed in blue, and Guy Bentley.

THYLOK (v. o.) Ren's world had a slight demon problem, some arcane confusion linking it to a hellscape. The demons were easy to dispatch but some strange alchemy was bleeding through the threshold. Rees, imbued with my strength, entered in.

Pic 5 Rees runs through the hellscape, fiery pits, lakes of ice, until finding . . .

THYLOK (v. o.) And there we found the original fauna and flora of hell.

Pic 6 In the lake of ice was a woman trapped, pale-skinned and white-haired.

THYLOK (v. o.) I think she was related to Ren somehow. Not sure how. Rees got her out and after teaching her language and how to experience something other than pain I named her Samantha Tay.

ROSE (v. o.) After my mother.

THYLOK (v. o.) I thought the affectation would please you. Her control over ice is quite remarkable, she can bring down whole columns of it upon an unwitting victim.

ROSE (v. o.) Hardly what I wish to see.

Page Five Six panels (three by two)
Pic 1 Café.

THYLOK Nor so do I. After the demonic expulsion, the hellscape afforded us new territories to explore. Which we've been doing ever since. My crew has grown step by step, gaining in strength.

ROSE The last two?

THYLOK Caj Droca, hero of the Silver Wars. His hands are artificial.

ROSE They do tend to enjoy their machine parts there, don't they?

THYLOK He wasn't difficult to recruit. No complex story, no saving from ruin. He just wanted a job since the war ended.

ROSE And the last is from here? Who?

THYLOK Wyrstok.

Pic 2 Black Rose's face seems downcast.

ROSE Why him?

THYLOK He asked. He summoned me, which is partly why I'm here. After our last game he took note. He wants to join, I want to say yes.

ROSE My brother should not be going with you anywhere.

THYLOK Maybe not, but it's his choice and I have already seen I will accept it. And that you will not. That is why I am here.

Pic 3 Grey and company are sitting in a white room working while outside men and women with metallic wings can be seen and dark-haired vampiric beings are walking the sideways below.

THYLOK (v. o.) He opened the door for me, you see. Grey did. He scattered himself through my life like fragments on a forest path. But I can always see what the future will be for me and where I can reject it and where I can accept it.

Pic 4 Thylok and crew wandering a hellscape, some flying, Caj with his mechanical hands palms out, and Wyrstok who can multiple himself spreading out, searching for some unknown thing.

THYLOK (v. o.) And my life and the fragments of it I can stitch together or tear apart, but some things I cannot change.

Pic 5 The café.

THYLOK In five years, seven months and sixteen days Wyrstok will be killed while we are scavenging the ruins of hell. I have seen it, I know it, but because of his nature, his division, he won't completely die and he won't completely live after ward. He will fragment too but will never put all the fragments together. That's why I'm here.

ROSE To gloat? To mock?

THYLOK No. To forgive.

ROSE I will not forgive you for the death of my brother.

Pic 6 Another figure has now sat beside them, he is next to Thylok. It is Wyrstok.

THYLOK Not forgiveness on my part or yours is needed. Wyrostok here needs to forgive the life he used to have. This is your brother from the time after his death.

WYROSTOK It's all like peering through fog . . . do I know you?

ROSE What am I to do . . . ?

THYLOK I leave him with you for him to heal, for him to take back the pieces of the life he lost. By doing this I cannot change the future but that means I am certain at least some part of him survives, which might not have happened otherwise. So, I leave him with you until he is well enough to return to me.

Page Six Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 Close-up of Rose's face

ROSE And what if I demand he never returns? Or what if I make certain he never heals enough for you to take him again?

THYLOK You won't, because you haven't, because you won't. This part of the story cannot be changed. He will heal, he will return to me. These brief seasons are the only time left for you two to be together.

Pic 2 Thylok stands up.

THYLOK I take my leave now, as I am supposed to. I will not tell you when I return, only that I will return. Beyond that, I leave the future open to you.

Pic 3 Thylok is outside, staring at the sky and the spiders walking over the buildings but he is indistinct as if on the cusp of vanishing.

Pic 4 Thylok is not there anymore.

Pic 5 Black Rose is staring at her brother and rising.

Pic 6 She sits next to him and hugs him while crying.

Story Nine Basil Basileus

Page One Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 An ordinary city. A man is standing on a street corner, looking absently about.

BASIL Another world, another year, another life.

Pic 2 Thylok is standing outside his window, skeletal, with the man inside, lying on his bed. A woman in white appears beside him, likewise standing in air.

THYLOK Hello Samantha. How fares our little family?

SAMANTHA Deirdre was worried about you. The others are as well. Where are we exactly? And who exactly is he?

THYLOK My future that never was.

Pic 3 Basil can be seen in an office, typing at an old typewriter, with Thylok and Samantha behind him, clearly invisible to everyone else.

THYLOK When I was created in Ameriya I was fashioned to be an instrument of war, a destroyer of worlds. That aggression, that violence had to go somewhere, to fester impotently away from the source of my power.

Pic 4 The two stare over Basil's shoulders to see him quietly drawing something, which is an image of Thylok devastating the army of Beatrice.

THYLOK So I fashioned him, giving him my nightmares and my dreams. At night and in rare moments of lucidity, he recalls the life I was meant to have, one of violence, of battling gods and demons and of turning all the difficulties of life, all the small grievances of being into a geography my alter ego can dispatch with the force of a hurricane.

SAMANTHA In other words a sociopathic version of yourself.

THYLOK Aren't all heroes seen that way by those not on their side?

SAMANTHA And so he puts all the stories you were meant to have on the page, as far from you as possible.

THYLOK Precisely. Of course, at some point, he will be me, or another version of me. A piece of my power may slip into the shard of his being. He might fly. He might see through objects or have skin like diamond, or shoot fire from his eyes. But all the violence is being laid here, page by page, line by line, exorcizing our sins a drawing at a time.

Pic 5 Basil is sitting in a café much like Thylok had done with Rose. He is eating a sandwich as a woman is sitting across him, looking much like Rose. Thylok and Tay are there as well.

THYLOK Eventually our lives will coalesce enough that he will start to consider his true life on Ameriya, and this life merely dream. Or

...

TAY Or, you will consider this life the truth and life in Ameriya was merely the dream. Is this what you want most Thylok? Not power or godhood, not epic struggles or walking the pillars of Creation, is all you really want the taste of a sandwich on a hot summer day, staring across from her?

THYLOK Not her, but otherwise.

TAY Immortals don't grow up though, do they?

THYLOK Only in dreams. We should be going I think. I have an appointment in Samara.

Pic 6 Basil and the woman start talking and laughing together, as if happy. Thylok and Tay are gone.

Story Ten The Hydropath

Page One Six panels (three by two)

Pic 1 Thylok is on the desert looking at pages fluttering about him. He has picked one up and is clearly reading it.

THYLOK There is a story I recall from when I was a boy. There was a secret valley in the world, home to a race of women, one in particular who had control of water.

Pic 2 The ghostly images of the women and the valley appear before him.

Pic 2 Thylok continues reading.

THYLOK They were refugees from another world who had forgotten their true origins. Well one day emissaries finally arrive to tell them of their true heritage.

Pic 3 Caravans like those of the green mutants can be seen. Leading them is someone who is apparently a king.

THYLOK The hydropath returns to the world of her origins only to realize the prince of this world wants to marry her and make her his bride.

Pic 4 The woman departs from him and is running away from a palace of many towers and spires.

THYLOK Did you know that water is one of the oldest things in existence? It might even predate stars, and being connected to this power the hydropath decided to find her own destiny.

Pic 5 The desert in the air suddenly blooms with flowers and animals and canals flow through the seemingly dead and ghostly world.

THYLOK So, she made her old world like the secret valley of her home, the mystical shores of a place cut off from the drab conformity of reality.

Pic 6 Now the real desert is in bloom as the others are gathered about, as if listening to him speaking.

THYLOK I always liked that story. I think it's time we got to work.

End

EAST OF JESUS

“The longer I live the more convinced I am
that other planets are using this planet
as an insane asylum.” George Bernard Shaw.

Prologue

Page One (Three panels arranged one by three.)

Pic 1 A pair of obvious Christians are on a street corner. They are white, dressed in white clothes and both are holding a sign saying ‘The end is nigh.’

Pic 2 A pair of beings pass by, alien to the Christians, literally. They are humanoid but look different, thinner, longer limbed, and their eyes are utterly black. The pair pause before the Christians and are looking at the signs.

Pic 3 The aliens walk on, but as they do the male alien says

MALE You’re too late bub, we’re already here.

Story One Vacations in Someone Else’s Hell

Page One (Three panels by four.)

Pic 1 A small rounded sphere of flesh is in a field surrounded by countless other small spheres, all coloured grey-green. The field is relatively barren except for small white flowers.

Pic 2 A large being is passing by, lumbering, snow-white skin, with black arms ending in three fingers, and long tendrils of white hair. He is before the sphere and there are thought bubbles coming from him. He is called Kurnluth.

KURNLUTH Angry, angry, angry, angry . . .

Pic 3 He picks up the small mound of flesh and seems to eat it. The creature, let’s call it T’c is panicking, and we can see its thoughts balloons.

T’C Oh God, is this hell?

Pic 4 The creature, called a masculyon is now walking on, with the thought balloon of T’c seen inside.

T’C What fresh hell is this?

KURNLUTH This ain’t hell little soth. You in Eneqpsigos.

T’C (balloon.) Eneqpsigos? The hydin country of the dead?

KURNLUTH Yep.

T’C (balloon.) I should be in heaven.

KURNLUTH If you wanted to be in heaven why’d you come to En-Il-Shayalal? Pretty

silly going to another world and not expecting the same afterlife as home?

Pic 5 Continuation.

T'C (balloon.) We came here because the worldliness of Earth has become too much. We came here specifically because we wanted to bring heaven to another world.

KURNLUTH Didn't you think another afterlife just *might* be here already? Azlyal already gave us a good country of the dead. We don't need another.

Pic 6 Kurnluth can be seen approaching what appears to be a vast stone city in the distance.

T'C (balloon.) Your Azlyal is a false god. Only worshipping the true God will lead you to salvation!

KURNLUTH Brother, do I look like I need your salvation?

Pic 7 Continuation.

T'C (balloon.) Hey, why did you eat me anyway?

KURNLUTH I didn't eat you. I'm masculyon. In life I was angry. Angry now. Angry while talking to you, angry while existing here. You are soth. Everyone in Eneqpsigos uses you to calm us down. You are . . . our narcotic. Kinda like how your God is to you.

T'C (balloon.) God is not a narcotic to us. He just makes us calm and relaxed and protects us from thinking too much and dictates our behaviour . . . oh God, he is like a narcotic, isn't he?

Pic 8 Continuation.

KURNLUTH Welcome to Eneqpsigos little drug-god.

T'C (balloon.) I am not a little drug-god!

KURNLUTH Keep telling yourself that.

Page Two (Three panels by two.)

Pic 1 On the road Kurnluth encounters a vine woman, a green-skinned woman who holds a long thorn in her hand like a sword.

KURNLUTH Hey.

VINE Are you ready?

KURNLUTH Sure. Got me calmer now. Had a soth. Say hi little drug-god.

T'C I am not a drug-god!

KURNLUTH Human from Earth. He's new.

Pic 2 Continuation.

VINE	You got a human soth in you? How does it feel?
KURNLUTH	Indigestion. He doesn't taste all that good.
T'C	You said you didn't eat me!
KURNLUTH	You're so bitter taste of you rises to my tongue.
VINE	What does he taste like?
KURNLUTH	Like bunt hymns and earwax. And a little like self-righteousness.

Pic 3 Continuation.

VINE	What does self-righteousness taste like?
KURNLUTH	You don't want to know.
VINE	Ready to fight?
KURNLUTH	Sure.
T'C	Wait! Fight!? Why?
KURNLUTH	Got to burn off the anger. Good duel will help.
T'C	I don't want to die!
KURNLUTH	Can't die in Eneqpsigos.
VINE	And after we make love.
T'C	I don't want to . . .

Pic 4 Both look down at Kurn's chest.

VINE	Don't want to what?
T'C	Never mind.
KURNLUTH	What were you going to say?
T'C	Not important.
KURNLUTH	Kinda important.
VINE	He never had sex before.
T'C	Go away.

Pic 5 Continuation.

KURN	You're right. You ain't ever had sex. Is that it?
T'C	I don't want to lose my virginity <i>after</i> I've died. And certainly not with the two of you.
KURN	You had all those Christian women in life around you, why didn't you fuck any of them?
T'C	Sex is a sacred duty, not something to waste on the unclean.
VINE	Small dick.
KURN	Small dick.

Pic 6 Continuation.

KURN	We fight, we make love, you . . . do you. We don't care.
VINE	Yeah. Get used to it. You're here as long as you are supposed to be.
T'C	What does that mean?
VINE	Azlyal can send you wherever you want to go if you want to go there. But now . . . we fight!
KURN	Then fuck!
T'C	Save me, God, save me!
KURN	Drug-god is funny.
T'C	I'm not a drug-god!
VINE	You sure he will make you calmer?
KURN	Calmer, no? But he is making me laugh.
VINE	Close enough.

Page Three (Three panels by two.)

Pic 1 Kurnluth and Vine are on the field, lying down next to each other.

T'C	That was the most disturbing thing I've ever experienced in my life.
KURN	You dead.
T'C	Close enough.
VINE	Why you come here anyway?
T'C	I am a servant of God.
VINE	You suck.
KURN	She's right. You suck.

Pic 2 Continuation.

T'C	How dare you say that.
VINE	You came here because you couldn't stand living in your own world. Why?
T'C	Humanity on Earth became too worldly, became anti-god. So the faithful left, to find a world for us to mould in our own image.
KURN	You don't have a face anymore. How is that working out for you?

Pic 3 Continuation.

T'C	We didn't imagine when we died we'd come here.
VINE	What did you imagine would happen?
T'C	I imagined that we would go to heaven or hell. And that you would go there too. Instead . . .
KURN	So you figured people who never heard of your God or his afterlife would somehow go to your God's afterlife, and that it was up to you to make us go where you wanted us to go, despite us having never <i>heard of you</i> ? <i>You suck.</i>

Pic 4 Continuation.

T'C What was it you said about Azlyal sending us where we want to go?
VINE You want to leave, Azlyal will take you away. Simple. Don't like it here
 pray to Azlyal and he will take you away to your heaven or your hell.

T'C I have to pray to a different god to go to my God's heaven?
VINE Sucks, doesn't it? But you should be used to that, because . . .
T'C I suck.

Pic 5 Continuation.

VINE He learns quick.
KURN Smart drug-god. Smart.
T'C Stop calling me that.
KURN No. Not till you pray to Azlyal.
T'C You are asking me to pray to a god I don't know because of arriving in an
 afterlife I didn't ask for.
KURN He catches on quick.
VINE He is smart.

Pic 6 Close-up of T'c in Kurn's body.

T'C So who is Azlyal, anyway?

Page Four (Three panels by two.)

Pic 1 A shanr can be seen, a thick-bodied, dark-skinned being, (not black, literally skin like
obsidian,) walking along the road. Kurn is near him.

SHANR Hey.
KURN Hey.
T'C What is he?
KURN He is a shanr. Their faces don't change. Can't express happiness or
 sadness or anything. Bet you must envy him fiercely. At least he has a
 face.
SHANR Soth?
KURN Human soth.
SHANR My condolences.

Pic 2 Continuation but the shanr is gone.

T'C Why can't shanr move their faces?
KURN In life they didn't show their feelings much. Now they can't. Believe
 everyone in afterlife is caarthri, irrational but them. You call them stoical.
T'C That's horrible.
KURN Why?

T'C They can't show happiness or sadness. That's punishment.
KURN Didn't show in life. Don't show now. Won't show next life, if they want
next life. How punishment? They are as they are.

Pic 3 Continuation.

KURN Think about yourself.
T'C What do you mean?
KURN Soth are meek, broken in life. Usually soth don't talk, but you aren't
normal soth. You are broken soth, talk too much. Usually soth like this
because they need someone else to occupy their life, then they slowly eat
through life after death till I don't exist, only you. But since soth usually
so much like host no one notices.
T'C I am not broken.
KURN If you weren't broken you wouldn't be soth.

Pic 4 The pair keep walking on road, fields in distance full of other soth.

KURN Soth come here broken, and get fixed by becoming. Those who keep soth
in them lose self, but after a while don't notice. Only the broken become
soth, only the broken taken soth inside, but I am broken by anger. You
broken because . . .
T'C Of God?
KURN I said nothing.
T'C You don't seem very anger you know.
KURN You are the tenth soth I've gone through in as many days. The one I was is
long gone.

Pic 5 Continuation.

T'C You have days here?
KURN This is a hollow world on the inner side of En-Il-Shayalal. Sun in sky is at
centre of world, but there are floating islands about it that cast long
shadows. So yeah, we got days and we got nights.
T'C Just like home.
KURN Keep telling yourself that.

Pic 6 Continuation.

T'C This Azlyal. He is your god, right?
KURN Right.
T'C He can take me out of this hell.
KURN Wish you didn't call it that. Hell is punishment, this is life.
T'C Yeah. So, I pray, how do I do that?
KURN Say 'Azlyal come here.' He comes. Then you talk.
T'C I just say Azlyal come here and he comes?

Page Five (One panel.)

Pic 1 A man is now standing before them, shadowy and indistinct.

AZLYAL	You called?
T'C	Fuck.

Page Six (Three panels by two.)

Pic 1 Azlyal and Kurn are on the field, sitting down, talking.

AZLYAL	So, you want to leave.
T'C	I don't belong here.
AZLYAL	You came to my world. I say you belong here.
T'C	I belong in heaven.
AZLYAL	You sure of that?
T'C	Yes. Take me to heaven.

Pic 2 Continuation.

AZLYAL	Tell me about your past life.
T'C	What?
AZLYAL	Past life, then I take you where you belong, where you deserve to go.
T'C	I came from Earth. I'm a Christian.
AZLYAL	Who are you?
T'C	I told you, I came from Earth and I'm a Christian.
AZLYAL	<i>Who are you?</i>
T'C	My name is John. I serve God, I sing hymns, I believe in the divine will of the Lord . . .
AZLYAL	Do you know why you are soth John?
T'C	No.
AZLYAL	Kurnluth, do you know why?

Pic 3 Continuation.

KURNLUTH	Because he is broken.
AZLYAL	Because he doesn't have a face. Oh, he has a body, but no identity. There is no self beneath the facade. You, John, do not really exist. Therefore, you don't have a face.
T'C	Send me to heaven. I told you who I am.
AZLYAL	Very well. I will take you where you deserve to be.

Pic 4 Massive glass cities on what seems to be the moon. Azlyal is walking, carrying T'c in his hands.

Pic 5 He places T'c in a slot beside countless brains.

Pic 6 John opens his eyes and is sitting in a park.

JOHN	Where am I?
AZLYAL	Earth. Your body is on the moon with the rest of the human race. What you are piloting is a robotic body, like everyone else has. This is where you belong.
JOHN	Wait, I deserve to be in heaven. I preached the salvation to the unclean, I deserve my reward!
AZLYAL	And you have it. Here is your reward, your brain is safely stuck on the moon for eternity with the rest of humanity while you get to preach to your own people. Forever.
JOHN	But they don't listen to me.
AZLYAL	Good. Listen to them instead. Goodbye.

Page Seven (One panel.)

Pic 1 Close-up of John's face.

JOHN	Wait! Take me back! I can't listen to them! They won't talk to me! No one listens to me, no one talks to me. God, are you there . . .
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Story Two Ishmekarab

Page One (Three panels by two.)

Pic 1 A shanr is walking about in a large city of stone. As he walks on, he sees a caravan passing by. A tstathis fly woman is next to him, brilliantly jewel-like with bright insect-like wings and sapphire gem eyes.

FLY	The tharns have arrived. They will be putting on a show soon. Come on.
SHANR	Why am I here?
FLY	Human?
SHANR	Yeah. I don't deserve to be . . . like this.
FLY	If you weren't like this you wouldn't be here. Come on. Let's go see the show.

Pic 2 A large crowd of different beings is watching a wooden stage as performers act on it, whose bodies seem to change and morph a great deal.

Pic 3 It is sunset and the shanr is now beside a large pillar of grey stone, with the tstathis by him still.

SHANR	That was interesting. I liked it.
FLY	Why are we here?
SHANR	In life this was my friend. I can feel it. Now he is a stone pillar. Why can some people change shape to anything they want, others have faces frozen, and others are nothing but stone, unable to move at all?
FLY	Don't ask me, I don't know about humans. But among the hydin tsaeleks like this occur when someone seeks to be so far apart from the world that they cease to have any connection to it. In life those people are already dead. And the tharn, in life they were everything for everyone, changing themselves to suit the whims of those around them. And maiorui shanr like you, in life you didn't smile or weep, so now you can't.

Pic 4 Continuation.

SHANR	So your God is punishing us?
FLY	It ain't a punishment being yourself after you're dead. It's just being yourself. What do you as yourself is up to you.

Pic 5 Shanr is among the weavers, grey people who weave threads from their hands. He is indicating something he wants made.

Pic 6 Shanr has a mask made of himself, his human face which he is wearing on the street corner. It is smiling. In his hand are several more, angry, sad, etc. Fly is beside him.

FLY	Nice face.
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SHANR Thanks. I had them make a bunch of drawings of Earth, they're at home.
Want to see them?
FLY Sure, I got time. All we really got here, long as we're able.
SHANR I think I hear music.
FLY Yeah, some hydin turn into music when they die. Maybe some humans do
too now. Since it ain't a hymn don't think it's a human.
SHANR Never know. I suppose we're all capable of change after we die.

Story Three Sea of Fragments

Page One (Three panels by two.)

Pic 1 Living music can be seen flying through the air, looking like musical notes in human form. A tstathis fly is beside it.

FLY	So, how you are enjoying the view?
SONG	How can I hear you? I don't have ears.
FLY	Song is heard, song hears. That's the miracle of the world here. How you doing?
SONG	Been better.
FLY	Human?
SONG	Was.

Pic 2 Another wraithlike form emerges by them.

SE'IRIM	Greetings. I bring word from the outer worlds.
SONG	What is he?
FLY	A se'irim, a traveller in other worlds. We can go with him as he wants to take us along. What word do you bring?
SE'IRIM	Cats are cute.
FLY	I was not expecting that.
SONG	Nor I.
SE'IRIM	Come, I must show someone my discovery.
SONG	Sure, I'm game, what else am I gonna do?

Pic 3 A vast plain of tall grass. The three are floating above it.

SONG	Where are we?
SE'IRIM	The world of Tsulasph. All animals here are cats.

Pic 4 A massive elephant-like ginger cat wanders by.

SONG	That was a cat?
SE'IRIM	All niches are taken up by cats. Small creatures pretend they are insects, larger beasts pretend they are titans, and still larger ones pretend they are leviathans.
SONG	That's nice. Why show us?
SE'IRIM	Why not? It's not everyday you see this, is it?
FLY	He has a point. It is very beautiful.

Pic 5 Se'irim leaves.

SONG	So, do we just wait here or . . .
FLY	He'll be back. They do this sometimes.
SONG	Are all worlds like . . . this?

FLY No, worlds come in all forms, as do people.

Pic 6 Flashback. Song is looking at people clothed in thick robes concealing everything. Fly is there.

SONG What are they?

FLY Tlyaeli. In life they were leaders, now none may see them without going mad, which will be reflected upon the tlyaeli themselves.

SONG That sucks.

FLY How so? So long as tlyaeli are never seen they can be anything potentially. The act of seeing is the same as the act of destroying.

SONG That's inane. If you don't know something's there you can't imagine it's there.

FLY Have you ever been influenced by a book you've never read?

Page Two (Three panels by two.)

Pic 1 The three are on another world. It is darker and there are cities in the distance like silver spires.

SONG Where is this?

FLY Alchochoder. The people here determine who long we live.

SE'IRIM They cut the strands of life elsewhere, ending our time in the mortal lands.

SONG I would have thought God would do that, or your Azlyal.

FLY They don't know they're doing it. Certain things they do, cross a street, fall in love, complain, bicker, barter for a piece of bread, it all determines how long you and I live.

Pic 2 Continuation.

SONG That's stupid. If they don't know what they're doing why doesn't someone tell them, tell them they're affecting us every second of every day?

FLY And what would happen then? They don't know how much power they have and certainly don't know what actions lead to what results. You tell them and they try to work it all out, but they don't see us so all they'll do is spend their entire lives trying to piece out how their lives affect ours, meaning they won't be living at all, which means we won't be living either. Sometimes you just have to let things be.

Pic 3 Back to the tlyaeli on the road.

SONG Can they tell what they look like?

FLY Not really. They don't have a means of staring at themselves without going mad so they just don't bother.

SONG What if looking won't drive them mad though, what if it's all just a fraud?

FLY Then that teaches them humility if they're wrong, and if they're right it

teaches them the boundaries of what they can do, and what they can't.
SONG I think you hydin are crazy people.
FLY How do you define sanity in a world of gods?
SONG My God is supposed to make everything make sense.

Pic 4 Continuation.

FLY So why weren't you told about En-Il-Shayalal before then, or Eneqpsigos?
If he knows, why didn't he tell you?

Pic 5 Back to the world of cats.

SONG Think I'm going to play myself out here.
FLY Yeah.
SONG Yeah. I got a concert of myself to finish up.
SE'IRIM We'll be back in a few days. Have fun.

Pic 6 Song is playing herself out across the winds, and the giant cats occasionally look up as if staring up at her.

Story Four A Darker Shade of Grey

Page One (Three panels by two.)

Pic 1 A Mermaid has arrived on Eneqpsigos and is swimming in a river near a field of soth. She has no mouth though.

MER (balloon.) This isn't what I thought it would be like. I thought heaven was nicer than this.

Pic 2 A Fly is walking by the river.

FLY And who are you and how came you here? Oh, no mouth. Easily fixed.

Pic 3 Song arrives in the air.

FLY Go into her and you can be her voice for a time.

SONG Seriously?

FLY Kid you not. Go.

Pic 4 The Mermaid seems to speak.

MER How came I here? Where am I?

FLY Eneqpsigos, the country of the dead of En-Il-Shayalal. And who are you?

MER I am a mermaid. I do not recall my name. What are you?

FLY I am a tstathis fly. Your voice is a friend of mine. Let us talk and see where our paths lie.

Pic 5 Different spot of the river, the Mermaid with her arms on the banks.

MER So, I am on another planet? That is . . . wow.

FLY Yeah, but what are you exactly? What's a mermaid?

SONG Mythic creature from Earth. Not real.

FLY This is not good. Myths from one world should not cross to another. Perhaps Azlyal should know.

Pic 6 Azlyal is now standing behind her.

AZLYAL Know what?

FLY This is a mermaid. You two should talk.

Page Two (Three panels by two.)

Pic 1 Azlyal is kneeling by the river, Fly and Song having left, the Mermaid now having a mouth.

MER On Earth mermaids have no souls, only turn to sea foam. Somehow though I am dead, and am alive.

AZLYAL	Dang it. One thing for the Christians to mess up the country of death, but bringing all the other myths in their wake . . .
MER	Am I in trouble? Will you cast me out?
AZLYAL	What? No. Why?
MER	We have no souls.
AZLYAL	Now you do.
MER	Thanks.
AZLYAL	You're welcome.

Pic 2 Continuation.

MER	So we are welcomed in your kingdom?
AZLYAL	When demons start popping up I'm gonna be pissed but you seem fine. I'm giving you a pass. So what do mermaids do on Earth?
MER	We swim and frolic and play games . . .
AZLYAL	You led a very boring life, didn't you?
MER	Extremely so, yes. Perhaps I should emulate the young insect I saw. Her life seems nice.
AZLYAL	Tstathis flies. In life they sought beauty, in death they are beautiful.
MER	What makes them beautiful?
AZLYAL	Seeking beauty in life.
MER	That's . . . bizarre.
AZLYAL	I suppose so, but what isn't.
MER	How can I seek beauty after death?

Pic 3 Continuation.

AZLYAL	I have no idea. I'm just a god.
MER	But shouldn't a god know everything?
AZLYAL	Should I know what cocaine tastes like on a stripper's stomach?
MER	Beg your pardon?
AZLYAL	Or should I know what a black hole smells like?
MER	I don't . . . really know.
AZLYAL	I know what a uolirian hedonist wants, and I know what makes a tstathis fly beautiful. I know this annoying soth who was a Christian and how he's complaining I left him on Earth. I know this planet populated only by cats . . .
MER	You made that last one up, right?
AZLYAL	And I know that I don't know everything. If I knew everything, I'd know I don't know everything and I'd suck at my job.

Pic 4 Continuation.

MER	In other words I have to figure things out for myself.
AZLYAL	Yep.
MER	Is there really a planet of cats?

AZLYAL I'll let you in on a terrible secret. There's a moon populated only by mice that orbits it. The day the cats reach the moon is the day the mice die.
MER That's horrible.
AZLYAL The best jokes often are.

Pic 5 Continuation.

MER I can't keep this mouth, can I?
AZLYAL No. You have to go back to your original form.
MER So, I won't be able to speak.
AZLYAL Sure you will. Your skin changes colour based on your mood and your thoughts. I don't know beauty for everyone but I know what's beautiful on Eneqpsigos.

Pic 6 The Mermaid is in the river suffused with all kinds of brilliant colours as Azlyal is walking on the field beside her.

AZLYAL First the Christians, now mermaids. When dragons show up I am resigning. Then again, everything that comes here came here for a good cause. Suppose can't be too mad, seeking beauty after the fact.

Story Five Tel Masos

Page One (Three panels by two.)

Pic 1 A tstathis fly is among a bunch of silvery people and she appears angry, her glistening body is scarlet with rage.

FLY	Where am I? Where's heaven?
HEDONIST	You are in Eneqpsigos. We are the uolirians. How can we help?
FLY	I don't belong here. I belong in heaven.
HEDONIST	You were human.
FLY	I am human, yes.
HEDONIST	Keep thinking that, it might help.

Pic 2 The Fly is among another bunch of people, their bodies made of stone with wraiths above, connected to them at the shoulders.

FLY	More strange people. What are you supposed to be?
YV	We are the yv. You are a tstathis fly.
FLY	I am a woman.
YV	That too. I guess.
FLY	This world is crazy. I have to get out of here.

Pic 3 Azlyal is standing beside her.

FLY	So you're in charge.
AZLYAL	I'm Azlyal, the god of the world. And you?
FLY	Jane. My name is Jane.
AZLYAL	Pleased to meet you.
FLY	I'm not in heaven. I'm not an angel. Why am I here, <i>like this</i> ?
AZLYAL	Because you want to be. Because this is who you really are. Follow me.

Pic 4 They are standing near the sun on one of the floating islands, looking down upon the vast world below.

AZLYAL	All this is the country of the dead. There are countless variations of its inhabitants. Shanr, tstathis flies, tlyaeli, ctaetl, ysalmiyer, birgiri. In life, they gravitated toward one value or another and now in death, they are that value, overburdened and overbalanced beyond mere surface appearance.
FLY	Is that why I look like this?
AZLYAL	You sought beauty, you are beauty.
FLY	Where is God?
AZLYAL	You're looking at him. At least god here.
FLY	I'm not impressed.
AZLYAL	I'm not impressive.
FLY	I noticed.

Pic 5 Continuation.

FLY I supposed since I don't worship you then you will punish me, or is this not punishment enough?
AZLYAL Look over here. You're going to love this.

Pic 6 A golden-skinned man is flying through the air just below the islands.

AZLYAL See him? He is a tsualani.
FLY How is he flying?
AZLYALA Tsualani are very special to me. They have absolute confidence in themselves. No doubt. No hesitation. So here so long as they think they can fly they can fly. Simple as that.
FLY Why show me this?
AZLYAL You, my dear, have wings. You can fly. He doesn't, but he can too. He doesn't question this country *because he is living in it*. Your God is not here, but you are. You can leave, but you won't. I know you won't because I know you. All you will do is fly. Beyond that, I know nothing more.

Pic 6 The Fly takes off and is now flying near the tsualani, their eyes locked toward each other.

FLY (v. o.) I didn't know then I found heaven. It took a while to figure it out. All I knew was I wanted to fly, and I wanted to see flight from people without wings. I wonder how long it will be before I can do the same as them?

Story Six And I'm Chedorlaomer, King of Elam

Page One (Three panels by two.)

Pic 1 A priest is standing among a group of medusan-like beings, with blue tendrils of hair and orange skin.

PRIEST I am here to preach the word of God.

Pic 2 The same image but now the priest is likewise like all of them in appearance.

PRIEST This may be more difficult than initially appears.

Pic 3 The slaegruel are watching the tharns put on a play. The priest appears humans throughout, and though the wooden stage is seen and the audience 'behind' it from the perspective of the reader the actors themselves cannot be seen.

PRIEST These beings, what sort of drama do they show?

SLAEGRUEL Why it is the story of the creation of the world.

PRIEST Of how God made all things?

SLAEGRUEL Exactly.

PRIEST Where is God?

SLAEGRUEL That one.

PRIEST The one with the clubbed foot and the extra eye, the one with the horns and the pitchfork? That is God?

SLAEGRUEL No, that is God's brother. His name is Turnip, he lives in Arizona and likes yoghurt. That is God, next to him.

PRIEST Ah.

Pic 4 The two are talking are everyone else has gone. Behind them can be seen thin purple people milling about.

PRIEST That was interesting.

SLAEGRUEL I liked it.

PRIEST The people behind us, who are they?

SLAEGRUEL Tlxioli. They always want to help.

PRIEST How do they help?

SLAEGRUEL By staying out of everyone's way.

Pic 5 Continuation.

PRIEST You lie.

SLAEGRUEL Me? Never.

PRIEST There were tlyaeli about. They were leaders, right? I thought I saw them too.

SLAEGRUEL They have left. No one who can't see them is here so they have no reason to stay.

PRIEST Why do you stay?
SLAEGRUEL You need me.

Pic 6 Slaegrue is on stage, but beside him is a uolirian, tharn, tlyaeli and tlxioli.

SLAEGRUEL Slaegrue are the liars of our god. We are not uolirians who seek pleasures nor tharns who seek flesh to become. We are not leaders or followers. We lie. As do you.

PRIEST I am not a liar.
SLAEGRUEL T he birgiri are the tallest in the world because in life they wished to see farther than any. They have libraries filled with books of crystal where they write their secrets down. But our wisdom is in never saying the truth, only the best of lies, the most comforting deceptions.

PRIEST So, what you are saying isn't true.
SLAEGRUEL Of course not. It is a lie, but so long as you know it is a lie it is the truth. Our profession and yours are identical.

Page Two (Three panels by two.)
Pic 1 Continuation.

PRIEST Why tell me all this?
SLAEGRUEL You are slaegrue now, a liar revered as a liar. The birgiri are watching us, right now they are recording your epic in one of their crystal books, and someday you will go into their libraries and find the epic of your life written down and claim it is not your life because the events they perceive are not the events you perceived when you lived them.

Pic 2 Continuation.

SLAEGRUEL But the fact remains we lie to ourselves all the time, and the life we lived is not the life we actually remember.

PRIEST These birgiri, these far seers, if they see all then they know my desire to preach.

SLAEGRUEL They know your desire to deceive, for you are slaegrue now and we deceive.

PRIEST So is this a deception then? Are you telling me the truth?

Pic 3 Continuation.

SLAEGRUEL How do you know I am telling you the truth? All this, all this could just be a deception after all.

Pic 4 Close-up of Priest's face.

PRIEST If I don't know what is true or not from you how can we live together at all? How can I trust you?

Pic 5 Close-up of Slaegrue.

SLAEGRUEL You do not trust me now, for am I not a worshipper of Azlyal, and is not Azlyal a god of lies, that old serpent you mistake for the devil?

PRIEST (Not seen.) That is why I am here, to preach the truth to you.

Pic 6 Close-up of Priest's face.

SLAE (Not seen.) And what if I just agree with you and pretend to change my ways, if I just lie and say you're right, and you never know, all of your days?

PRIEST Well then you wouldn't gain anything by my preaching, would you?
Although, I suppose if we slaegrue lie in positive ways the best way to lie is to convince someone we can't change, and then subtly change the other person day by day.

SLAE (Not seen.) Is that what you believe, or what you say?

Story Seven Lagamal

Page One (Three panels by two.)

Pic 1 A se'irim is in the depth of space.

SE'IRIM Where am I? This isn't . . . anywhere! I need to go.

Pic 2 He is orbiting Earth.

SE'IRIM I'm home.

Pic 3 Se'irim is walking through the glass cities on the moon.

SE'IRIM This is where all humanity is now, except us. But I'm not part of anyone right now. I'm not even really here.

Pic 4 Notices a small nodule of flesh among the brains.

SE'IRIM What might you be? Figure it out later.

Pic 5 A scorpion woman can be seen, tanned with two barbs along her wrist and a long scorpion tail. She is standing in the cities of glass.

SE'IRIM What might you be? And how are you here?

SCORPION I am a scorpion woman. Where is this?

SE'IRIM Earth's moon. Were you human?

SCORPION No. I am hydin. You?

SE'IRIM I'm human.

SCORPION I must fight. You are my opponent I suppose.

SE'IRIM Say what?

Pic 6 She tries to fight him but he is a wraith, immaterial. She is clearly exhausted.

SE'IRIM What is the point of this? You can't hurt me. All you are doing is wearing yourself out.

SCORPION I feel the need to fight. I know not why I was brought here. Wait?

Page Two (Three panels by two.)

Pic1 She has seen the soth.

SCORPION He does not belong here. You must take us back home.

SE'IRIM I am of Earth. I wish to stay.

SCORPION You are dead.

SE'IRIM I feel fine.

SCORPION Take us home. Take yourself home too.

SE'IRIM I don't want to. I want to see . . .

Pic 2 Continuation.

SCORPION	What?
SE'IRIM	I wanted to see home, but I can't really, can I? These eyes are not human eyes, this body is a wraith's body. I am dead and can never go home again.

Pic 3 The three of them are now upon the soth fields.

SE'IRIM	This is where I belong now. With you.
SCORPION	Me?
SE'IRIM	Next time tomorrow look me up. We will fight again, and again and again, until I regain my flesh, my ability to touch, and I lose the fight to you.

Pic 4 Continuation.

SE'IRIM	Till then all we can really do is keep trying to pretend we've got something to look forward to. That's all we can really do.
SCORPION	You are a strange man.
SE'IRIM	I've been told so many times before. Nice to meet you anyway.

Pic 5 She tries to slash at him again.

SCORPION	Nice to meet you too. See you again tomorrow.
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Pic 6 She walks on, leaving T'c in the fields.

SE'IRIM	Well, what does a dead man do in a place like this? I suppose I can't go home, but there are trillions of other worlds to tread. I got time. Life's just waiting out there, looking for things to happen.
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Story Eight Simurgh

Page One (Three panels by one.)

Pic 1 A uchulua, or uchula, a giant manta ray flying in the air is passing one of the floating islands. Below on the ground a massive ul'rusuul can be seen, a great giant worm hundreds of feet long.

UCHULA	Another day in flight. Another day after that. How you doing old worm?
UL	Can't complain, can't complain.
UCHULA	You know, I wonder if we are truly stuck in the humans' hell.
UL	However do you mean my oldest friend?

Pic 2 A view of Earth with the two orbiting about it.

ULCHULA	The humans imagine our world to be false and theirs to be true.
UL	Not all the humans, just some.
ULCHULA	But imagine if we are just paintings, images of ourselves, created by humans, our own existence occupying no further boundaries than the countries of their skulls.
UL	What then?

Pic 3 Continuation.

ULCHULA	Then even if we are right in our own ways and our worlds still we are wrong according to them.
UL	But then, what if there are larger beings beyond who make the humans in our world imagine they are right when they are wrong? Where does it end?
ULCHULA	It never ends my friend, so the best one can do is live the best one can, and let our old essences pour into the skulls of lesser and greater men.

Story Nine Atar'atah

Page One (Three panels by two.)

Pic 1 Azlyal is alone by a vast field.

AZLYAL I will describe to you the problem of the biting men. Imagine a man who sees before him another man, whom he hates. All the first man can do is bite the second at the back of the neck. But lo, without realizing it, there is a man behind him, as angry at him as he is angry at the man before him. So, as he goes to bite the man behind him goes to bite, and the man ahead goes to bite, and so as each one attempts to wound the other, they are out of reach of the harm meant to be visited upon them. In this way to achieve perfect peace is by raging hatred, always mis-aimed.

Pic 2 Azlyal is in the field and another is beside him. This other is white and indistinct.

AZLYAL So you are here.
MAN IN WHITE I am here.
AZLYAL Your followers continue to press their weight on me. Even though this world is infinite in space and each life is infinite in variety your followers are like slivers in my eye, wounding me ever so subtly and slightly.
MAN They are that they are. I have no hold over them.
AZLYAL No hold? They worship you. And they've come here trying to upend my world in the process.

Pic 3 Continuation.

MAN It's not like they don't have cause.
AZLYAL How's the messiah doing?
MAN Why mention him?
AZLYAL Because whenever you come here you mention him. Oh, he is about to save the world, about to usher in humanity's salvation, just around the corner, and then another millennium passes and he hasn't done shit.

Pic 4 Continuation.

AZLYAL We are the constructs of their desires impressed upon us. The humans made you, the hydin made me. But you don't show yourself to your faithful, and you always wait. All of your promises are future-tense. Your chosen one will save mankind **any day now**, and while you torture your faithful with waiting the dead of my kingdom get on with their lives.

MAN There must be an accounting of the scales.
AZLYAL No one can choose wrong at every point in their lives. No one can consistently make every wrong choice in life, so no one can deserve damnation. None of those who rejected you are in hell. Hell has been

closed and empty for as long as I can remember but you keep the lights on and pretend it's still occupied. Your only salvation is your faithful can't count and don't notice everyone they expect at the party is there.

MAN

I am a benevolent deity.

AZLYAL

You are benevolent toward yourself, but otherwise a despot, and your benevolent despotism is not cute or endearing, but cynical and sly. And I am warning you to stop.

Pic 5 Continuation.

MAN

Or else?

AZLYAL

I will make my own messiah, and worse, as the dead of your world come to my afterlife the dead of my world will come to your afterlife. A few have already slipped to your Earth, it's only a matter of time before they slip to your heaven.

MAN

You wouldn't.

AZLYAL

Try me.

MAN

What do you want?

Pic 6 Continuation.

AZLYAL

Reveal that Eneqpsigos is as close to paradise as they will get so they will stop complaining about not going to heaven.

MAN

I will not reveal myself to those who are not in heaven.

AZLYAL

Then we are at an impasse, and where you are passive, I am active.

Goodbye. *Let the souls fall where they may.*

MAN

You do not threaten me. I am a vengeful God.

AZLYAL

Yeah, but I know what the fuck I'm doing. See you around.

Story Ten Ehecatl

Page One (Three panels by two.)

Pic 1 A group of people are gathered about, all human, men and women, etc, at a nice restaurant. The Man is looking from the group directly at the reader.

MAN Ever notice how much dating sucks? I mean meeting and getting together, choosing places to eat, choosing who to spend your life with?

Pic 2 A wedding, the same Man is there.

MAN But marriage, that doesn't make things better, does it? I mean the goal is to create children, settle down, find your significant other, but too often people choose poorly, or just choose wrong, and the happiness they thought they were going to have they don't.

Pic 3 Same Man, but now solitary, sitting in an apartment alone.

MAN But being single doesn't seem to help much either.

Pic 4 The man is now standing in a city in Eneqpsigos.

MAN But then you come to the place of the dead, and everything gets turned on its head.

Pic 5 Man is among slaegruel and shanr watching the tharns perform.

MAN How do you fall in love when the person you loved in life is another species here? Two people in the living world spend their lives together, hating each other, loving each other, and then they come here and meet each other again, but one is a slaegruel, the other shanr. One can only lie helpfully and the other cannot express a single emotion.

Pic 6 The Man is among the birgiri, these very tall violet-brown-skinned people in their libraries surrounded by crystal books.

MAN The birgiri were those in life always trying to see further ahead, and after death, they collated the lives of the once-living. They made genealogies of past existence, and notice where those lives end up here. And yet sometimes, just sometimes two find each other again. A slaegruel falls in love with a tsualani, a soth connects intimately to a scorpion woman, and it's like for a little while they forget why they hated being together in the first place.

Page Two (Three panels by two.)
Pic 1 Continuation.

MAN They made genealogies of past experience, those birgiri in their libraries
of crystal, trying to see further ahead. But you want to know a funny thing?
They seldom found themselves with others. All those wandering souls are
just alone with their thoughts.

Pic 2 The Man is upon the plains and in his hand is a soth.

MAN After a while you wonder who has the best time here. The soth without limb or sense, or the birgiri without another like themselves for company, poring over books looking for loves they never had while the soth get consumed in the desires of others.

Pic 3 The Man is alone upon the fields now, amid the tall grass, sitting down, staring upward at the sun which has cast a deep shadow behind him.

MAN I suppose that's the only thing Azlyal can't provide. He can't make a world after death fit for two. Either it's a world tailored for one or a world tailored for one consuming another.

Pic 4 Azlyal is now behind him.

AZLYAL And do you think your heaven is any better?
MAN Better? No. But over there I take the place of the lovers they never had.
They never feel alone with me by their side.
AZLYAL Of course they don't. In your heaven they can't divorce you, can they?
They can't admit they made the wrong choice because they fear being
alone in hell.
MAN Why are you here?
AZLYAL Why are you?

Pic 5 Continuation.

MAN My father says you will lead the armies of the damned into heaven, and I wanted to see your precious armies.

AZLYAL They are no more damned than yours.

MAN I supposed no one ever really imagines they are damned.

AZLYAL Only the truly deserving of heaven imagine they are damned. You above all should realize that.

MAN I should be going back the way I came.

Pic 6 Continuation.

AZLYAL You should know before you leave that your worshipers keep expecting to arrive in your heaven and become disappointed in what they imagine to be hell. I told your father enough is enough. You mention being alone or being together as suffering, well let me tell you a secret. Everyone suffers the moment they don't get what they expect they deserve. But the fault is not theirs, it is the one who engenders such desires in them.

MAN I'll keep that in mind.

AZLYAL One more thing. If you don't settle this matter now I will go where your precious heavenly host is and teach them a beautiful word. The word divorce. I will show them my afterworld and perhaps they will empty your heaven and fill my own instead.

MAN You don't care about my worshippers enough for that.

AZLYAL You don't care about your worshippers enough to stop me. Prove me wrong. Now get the hell out of your own personal hell.

Story Eleven Mystery Without Clues

Page One (Three panels by two.)

Pic 1 A Detective is standing on the plains

DETECTIVE Where am I now? Where was I before? I was on En-Il-Shayalal, and then . . . ah yes. I died. So, this is the famous afterlife I've heard so much about. Hm. A bit disappointed really when you come to think about it.

Pic 2 The Detective is upon one of the floating islands, looking down.

DETECTIVE How did I come here? Must have flown. Don't have wings, yet I flew. Look at all that space below. Must be infinite. I feel something inside me. What is it? Ah, yes. I was a detective in life. Solved mysteries. Now here I am, and I feel the itch again.

Pic 3 Continuation.

DETECTIVE Strange. It's like a mosaic, a dim pattern in the back of my eyes. If I stare hard enough, I see the pattern form. I wonder why that is? Why do you perceive patterns where none may exist?

Pic 4 Detective is among a whole bunch of shanr in a room.

DETECTIVE A murder mystery. I've played at those before. But everyone here is incapable of changing their expressions. Can't tell if they're happy or sad about the dead man lying here. Can't tell if they loved him or hated him. Can't tell anything really. Much like in the real life I had before. Motives are always obscured.

Pic 5 Detective is in an audience watching the tharns perform on stage.

DETECTIVE We always play our roles but beside us sits arrogance and incompetence riding in the same boat. The more we think we know the less we do. Isn't that so, don't you think?

Pic 6 Azlyal is beside the Detective now.

AZLYAL I suppose it's true. What does it matter to you?
MAN You know there must be places where the maps don't show. Writers whose words are lost, epics unread, pleasures and joys lost along the sands of time. We notice them by their absences, the holes they leave in our lives, like impressions of shadows, or ghosts. We notice them because we know they aren't there, but they should be.

Page Two (Three panels by two.)

Pic 1 Detective and Azlyal are on one of the floating islands again.

DETECTIVE	You're the god here, aren't you?
AZLYAL	Yes, I am.
DETECTIVE	I imagine my people have been quite the burden to you.
AZLYAL	How so?
DETECTIVE	They expect heaven, and find this. Logically there must be a heaven though, even if it's only in the imaginations of the dying.
AZLYAL	How very perceptive of you.
DETECTIVE	Oh, I try. You know, I came with them not out of a belief in God but a belief in myself. Can you imagine that?

Pic 2 Continuation.

AZLYAL	How do you mean?
DETECTIVE	If there is a heaven does it extend beyond our world? Or a hell? They, my compatriots, imagined coming here to be a proof of God, but you and I both know heaven is circumscribed by the beliefs of the people in it, and where people differ beliefs differ likewise. I came here to see if my beliefs would shape where I end up, or if where I end up would shape my beliefs.

Pic 3 The pair are back watching the show.

DETECTIVE	I find this amusing.
AZLYAL	Why?
DETECTIVE	Another world and yet here are mysteries. A murder committed on stage and we both know the butler did it. The tlxioli is the murderer because no one expects the helper to be the one who done the most harm.
AZLYAL	Clever of you to figure it out.
DETECTIVE	Not really. Kind of obvious. Likewise, why you're here with me.

Pic 4 Continuation.

AZLYAL	How so?
DETECTIVE	You want the advice of the ones invading your space. You want permission from us to exile ourselves back to the way we came. Secretly you don't like us being here. You want us gone. You're just too polite to admit it, even to yourself.
AZLYAL	How are you so wise on matters such as these?
DETECTIVE	I read a lot of mysteries growing up. Easy to see the plot when you learn the shape of the absence of what isn't there.
AZLYAL	So, do I have your permission for your exile?
DETECTIVE	Nah. We both know it won't work.
AZLYAL	What do you mean?

Pic 5 Continuation.

DETECTIVE I imagine there must be a god of our world, from our world. Maybe he was made in the desires of us, but we've outgrown him. There was a time when the world was six thousand years old, and Eden was as real as London or Paris or Toronto. There was a time when the sun stood still before the walls of Jericho fell and the world had four corners to it, and angels with flaming swords stood at the gates of paradise, keeping us at bay. There was a time when the tower of Babel was real and was so close to the ceiling of the stars that a man could reach up and touch Polaris, Alpha Centauri, or Aldebaran. There was a time when a carpenter nailed to a cross was the pinnacle of salvation for us all. But we've outgrown them all.

Pic 6 Continuation.

DETECTIVE To be human is to fear where we end up after our humanity is spent. That's all heaven really is, or hell. The summation of our fears. But now we know the world is not the circumference of our sky, and the stars are not just lights in the dark. Now we know that we are just the link of a chain of beings going back to the time of bacteria and that before us was not the abyss but Pangaea and dinosaurs and hallucinations of things we couldn't imagine before learning they really were.

AZLYAL Why are you telling me this?

DETECTIVE This is your world, and this is your afterlife, just as much as it is ours. The others expected a simple conversion and then arrival in paradise. But we've slipped away from all that, did it before we ever came here. *And you know it.* If you send us away even if we find the heaven we expect our experiences here will follow with us, and it will warp our expectations in that other place, in that other alien paradise. Because, and let me reiterate this, this is no more a different afterlife from our expectations than a mystery is different from a solution. We only ever imagine we know what is coming until after it has arrived and proven us wrong.

Page Three (Three panels by one.)

Pic 1 Continuation.

AZLYAL Then what do you think I should do?

DETECTIVE Admit the truth to yourself.

AZLYAL Which is?

Pic 2 Continuation.

DETECTIVE You need us here as much as we need to be here. It is not some accident of unbirth. This place was prepared for us, just as it was prepared for the hydin.

Pic 3 Close-up of Azlyal's face, as he seems between a smile and a frown.

DET (Not seen.) You could no more get rid of us than a murderer's guilt not cling to him after the fact. We are as much your children as that of God. Because after all God is nothing more than the soon-to-be outgrown superstition of the unknown. And the more we know of you the less like God you'll be to us. So you can't get rid of us. We are as much a part of you as you are of us.

Story Twelve Meditations on an Execution

Page One (Three panels by two.)

Pic 1 A man is sitting in a cell.

Pic 2 He is standing upon a scaffold, a noose about his throat.

Pic 3 He falls, being hanged.

Pic 4 He wakes up upon the fields of the soth. He appears to be a masculyon, his human form outlined inside his new body.

PSYCHOPATH	What a strange place to wind up in.
AZLYAL	Indeed it is. You were a murderer, weren't you?
PSYCHO	I was, and who are you?
AZLYAL	This is my home. My name is Azlyal. You are welcome here.

Pic 5 Along the road they see some people with faces both before them, and faces on the backs of their heads.

PSYCHO	Who are they?
AZLYAL	People who in life tried to look both ways at everything.
PSYCHO	I want to kill you.
AZLYAL	Most people do, eventually.
PSYCHO	But I can't feel it anymore. I can't feel the itch the way I used to.

Pic 6 Continuation but now there are people of gold and silver walking by.

PSYCHO	Who are they?
AZLYAL	The peoples of Tu and Eu, the desirers of gold and silver who now are both.
PSYCHO	Why can't I kill you?
AZLYAL	Why do you want to?
PSYCHO	Why you?

Page Two (Three panels by two.)

Pic 1 Continuation.

AZLYAL	What makes you think I want to kill anyone?
PSYCHO	Like recognizes like. That's why.

Pic 2 A pair of scorpion women can be seen fighting each other on the road.

PSYCHO	Why do they fight?
AZLYAL	In life they were soldiers. In death, they feel compelled to duel.
PSYCHO	I feel compelled to kill, but my hands feel empty somehow.

AZLYAL Coming here you stopped being you. You've changed.

Pic 3 The pair are alone in the field.

PSYCHO I was on Earth. I know I was on Earth. What was the year I died? Not recent, it feels like a long time ago.

AZLYAL Centuries ago actually.

PSYCHO Where was I before now?

AZLYAL Don't know. Can't tell. You're a miracle, you fascist monster. Usually, all the humans who come here were on En-Il-Shayalal when they died.

Pic 4 Continuation.

PSYCHO Something has gone wrong. I slipped away from hell.

AZLYAL Hell was closed a long time ago. No one ever went there, they just imagined they did.

PSYCHO What of God?

AZLYAL Why would you serve a God that isn't there when you succeed? That isn't there when you commit your crimes in his name?

Pic 5 Continuation.

PSYCHO Have you seen my God?

AZLYAL You never worshipped gods, only men telling you who to kill. Never worshipped any god except the ones telling you to kill.

Pic 6 Continuation.

PSYCHO I remember the countries we invaded. I remember the screams of the dying. I remember expecting to wind up in fire, despite all the times I was told what we did we did right. But there is no fire here. And hell is closed. What will happen to me here? If I have lost the fire to kill who am I now? What is my punishment here?

Page Three (Three panels by one.)

Pic 1 Continuation.

AZLYAL Your punishment is being you. And that's your reward too. What do you expect from me exactly? Calculate your life, determine how much misery you caused and then calculate from that what should happen to you here. That's not my task, nor my purpose. I don't judge or determine or assign blame or assign praise. This place is not for you to act out your masochism *You have to live with being you.* You can't expect to suffer here to expunge the sufferings you did in life. You can't apologize to your victims and wash it all away. *You did what you are and you must remain doing what you are until you are no longer you.*

Pic 2 Continuation.

PSYCHO

I suppose that is punishment enough. Or reward or final judgment.

AZLYAL

Nope. You don't get closure, no one else does so you don't either. You are stuck being you.

Pic 3 Continuation.

PSYCHO

Until the end of time?

AZLYAL

There is no *end* to time. Nobody gets eternity because the clocks wind down eventually. Eventually, you'll forget exactly what you think you deserve because you'll have forgotten the wrongs you did in life. Nothing remains forever. Not even eternity. *This is not about you. Get out of your own fucking way.* And maybe eventually, so will I.

Story Thirteen Nothing Engenders Success, Like Success

Page One (Three panels by two.)

Pic 1 A view of the universe, infinite stars, galaxies, etc. Azlyal is walking in the midst of it.

AZLYAL The size of existence is a terrible thing. We can't really tell how big or how small anything is after a while.

Pic 2 Continuation.

AZLYAL The humans of Earth used to imagine they were the most important things in existence. You'd hear their prayers washing along stars like sea foam on glass. And their lives telescoped out, imagining after death there would be no ending, that the meagre existence of living determined the eternity spent in bliss or suffering.

Pic 3 Continuation.

AZLYAL There are stars out here so old they make the life of a man seem like that of a bacteria, and yet the life of the man itself seems an infinity. We are shaped by multitudes within and without. We are spent struggling and striving against the dark, against sunless planets and suffering hells. And why, I ask you why void? Why are they so much bigger inside than you? Why do they imagine they go on forever, little slivers of silver struggling against the weight of nonexistent hells?

Pic 4 Continuation only the Man in White is behind Azlyal.

AZLYAL Of course it's because they can't imagine ceasing to be. The smaller they are the more massive they expect their afterlife to be, like the balancing of scales, as if the more they suffered the less they need to do so here. Which leads to the question of what I am.

MAN IN WHITE Of what we are.

AZLYAL Ah, there you are.

MAN IN WHITE They expect afterlives because they want it all to make sense. And if they can't see sense in life, they imagine the gaps after will fill the void. The afterlife is the void filled, that's all it really is.

Pic 5 Continuation.

AZLYAL Day is coming when the stars will end when the sunless planets will cease, when the cannibal planets will have their final meal, and when the universe will be no more than void and emptiness.

MAN IN WHITE I know. And on that day heaven will close and Eneqpsigos cease to be. Even death will be swept away, even nothing will be nothing.

AZLYAL They can't imagine that. Even we can't.
MAN IN WHITE You asked me to hold them to account, all those people who worship me.
But I'm just the gap they filled with the image of me. I'm just the best,
closest thing they could come up with to explain themselves. I'm not
really here. I'm just void. They fill themselves up with what they imagine
me to be. That's all.

Pic 6 Continuation.

AZLYAL And each day you slip further away, don't you? The humans back on
Earth don't believe in you anymore.
MAN IN WHITE They never *really* believed in me, you know. It was never about believing
in me, it was always about preventing the void from being. Could have
been anything to keep the void at bay. I'm not really here, not really there.
Hell isn't really here either. Hell is just the fear of not knowing how big or
how small existence really is.
AZLYAL We should head back.
MAN IN WHITE Suppose so.
AZLYAL You know the funny thing?
MAN IN WHITE What?
AZLYAL No one prays to me, and I answer what they don't ask for. Everyone prays
to you and you never give them what they really want.
MAN IN WHITE What they want is someone who is there. As long as I don't answer they
can't be sure I'm not there listening, they can't be sure that no one is really
there.

Story Fourteen Memoirs to Prove the Existence of the Devil

Page One (Three panels by two.)

Pic 1 The Masculyon is on a street corner, preaching.

MASC Let me tell you the history of hell. Why do people believe in it? In a word, revenge.

Pic 2 The Masculyon is standing beside a lake of fire.

MASC The first people to imagine hell did so because they had no agency in life. They had to support others, prop other people up, save other people from their own worst actions and mistakes. And this engenders in them a growing resentment for being themselves.

Pic 3 Continuation.

MASC Ah, but they couldn't get revenge, no. Red raven cities of fire were denied them. Instead, they had to live a perfect life, and a perfect life is one without hate or violence or desire. It is an altruistic existence of constantly giving while constantly demanding that they are not giving enough. No, they are secretly selfish no matter how giving they are.

Pic 4 Continuation.

MASC These blind spots of human psychology engineered the desire to punish others while expecting themselves to do no punishment at all. No, instead they imagine some arbitrary thing to make all the choices, and the more darkness inside of them the more they pretend they are children of light because they can't expect to go to hell, even while demanding all else go instead.

Pic 5 Back to the street corner. A tsualani is walking by.

MASC Listen to me, people. Hell is all about us, even here. Seek ye God and be saved.

Pic 6 The tsualani is now flying overhead, away from him.

TSUALANI The problem with revenge is not achieving it, but failing to do so. If God is the arbiter of justice and injustice you can't really get revenge on God. Sometimes it's better to get revenge by walking away.

Story Fifteen Chrysalis in Want

Page One (Three panels by two.)

Pic 1 A large valley with trees about and hanging from them large chrysalises.

Pic 2 Some hatch to reveal winged creatures, similar to the tstathis flies who are now flying away.

Pic 3 The living song can be seen flittering among the trees.

SONG	What happens after the song ends? What happens after I end? Sometimes I wonder.
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Pic 4 Continuation.

SONG	This is one of En-Il-Shayalal's moons. These creatures look like tstathis flies, but they are born here. It's possible all the dead have corresponding living creatures existing elsewhere. Maybe the dead have living counterparts. Which means perhaps there is some place where songs are alive, where songs have skin.
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Pic 5 Azlyal is talking to a man.

MAN	I demand you send me to hell.
AZLYAL	My friend you were already there. Life is hell, is it is not?

Pic 6 Back in the valley on the moon.

SONG	Maybe to them this is the afterlife, and what came before, the oblivion of not being was heaven. Who can be sure? Not me, that's for damned sure.
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Story Sixteen Our Boring Dystopia

Page One (Three panels by two.)

Pic 1 The tharns are in their caravan travelling the world.

THARN	I remember the silver screen. I was an actor once, back on Earth. And I'm an actor here. Funny how life works out.
THARN 2	You remember all the misery of playing those roles? We weren't allowed to be ourselves. And I suppose we aren't allowed to be ourselves here.
THARN 3	Were we ever ourselves? Was there even an 'us' before now? Do we even exist? Imagine Azlyal on stage and no one watching him. Is he really there?
THARN 4	If you can't reason with something you're not safe from it. All this talk means nothing. We have a show to put on, heroes and villains to be, and that's it.
THARN	And when the show ends?
THARN 4	That's just it. What makes you think the show ever ends?

Pic 2 The living song is on Earth. She moves among robotic bodies, and pauses before one.

ROBOT	It's grandfather's voice. They're selling me something using my grandfather's voice.
SONG	Can you hear me?
ROBOT	Now I hear the voice of my wife. I suppose eventually they'll sell things using my own voice, selling something from myself to myself in time.

Pic 3 The song is by a mirror of a building on Earth and a woman is in the mirror. She is ysalmyier.

MIRROR	Hello. Can you hear me?
SONG	I can hear you. What was he talking about?
MIRROR	The latest thing. Some companies are using the voices of the dead to sell their products. I was drawn to the sound of my boyfriend.
SONG	Why are we on Earth?
MIRROR	The barriers are slipping. The demarcations between the worlds are breaking down. Lilith and Samael have been seen in parks in New York, even though their stories began on En-Il-Shayalal.

Pic 4 Continuation.

SONG	Is that who you are looking for?
MIRROR	I think so, yes. How about you?
SONG	Maybe I'm looking for them too. We're they the originators of the hydin? A woman and an angel of death?
MIRROR	Yeah, that's how the story goes.
SONG	Maybe I'm looking for them. Maybe I was looking for you and now that

I've found you I don't know what to do with you.

Pic 5 Continuation.

MIRROR	I can't carry anything with me like this. I can't be anything else but this.
SONG	So, just pretend you can and go from there.

Pic 6 Continuation.

MIRROR	I think the sun is going away.
SONG	Maybe it is. I can't say. Have you heard the merchants selling themselves?
	I thought it quite funny but now I'm not so sure anymore.
MIRROR	The worlds are slipping away.

Story Seventeen Why is There Something Instead of Nothing?

Page One (Three panels by two.)

Pic 1 The soth fields and T'c there.

FLY	So where are you now?
T'C	Here. I'm here.
FLY	I heard you were on Earth. How did you get back?
T'C	A scorpion woman brought me back.
FLY	What was Earth like?
T'C	Worldly, I guess.

Pic 2 Continuation.

T'C	I saw galleries of pictures of hell and heaven. But I couldn't touch them, not really. I wasn't really there. I was on the moon the whole time, just pretending I was on Earth.
FLY	Would you want to go back?
T'C	I don't think so. No one listened to me there, no one heard me no matter what I said. Heaven isn't a place, it's a state of happiness and I am as happy here as I've ever been.

Pic 3 Continuation.

FLY	Why do you think we believed what we believed?
T'C	You mean God? Salvation? Heaven?
FLY	Yeah.
T'C	Ever heard the story of Bontsha the Silent?
FLY	No.
T'C	Bontsha was this man who was silent his whole life, never spoke out no matter how bad things got. Well in heaven he is brought before the angels to account for himself. They all mistake his silence for humility, but he is broken inside.

Pic 4 Continuation.

T'C	So, at the end he is welcomed in and they ask him what he wants, all that he desires. And do you know what it is he asks for?
FLY	No.
T'C	That each day he receives a hot roll with butter. The answer so shocks the angels that they all fall silent too. The end.
FLY	And the point of the story is?
T'C	The point is it didn't matter where Bontsha went. He carried his own ruin with him his whole life. You can't pretend going somewhere else will fix what makes you you. But we expected God to fix us, and that if we made other people like us, we'd make us the kind of people we wanted to be.

Pic 5 Continuation.

FLY	And instead . . . we look like this.
T'C	Yeah, pretty much.
FLY	And what if we'd never come here?
T'C	No other world has a heaven or a hell like we expected. There are just infinite gradations of grey out there. Here or elsewhere, we wouldn't really change.

Pic 6 Azlyal is sitting on a rock looking at the stars.

AZLYAL	I am the creator of my own small private universe. God is walking on the shore waiting for something to happen, but it never does. He can't really let go of expecting his followers to wait for him, but they can't anymore. Ah fuck it, what was it all for? I suppose it's for the being of the moment, and after that, what does it matter where our bodies and our souls go? No one wants to admit that they are alone.
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End

THE PRISONER

Page One (Nine panels.)

Pic 1 A view of space. Two blue-green planets can be suspended in errant nothingness, each the same size as the other.

Pic 2 A spaceship can be seen coming toward one of the planets. It is oval and small.

Pic 3 The space has landed on a lush, fertile and green garden ground. The hatch opens to reveal a Man has gotten out. The man is dark-skinned, handsome, and is wearing a space suit.

Pic 4 In the hollows of trees colonies of beetles can be seen, crawling much as the worms crawled under the sand. Jellyfish can be seen swimming sky. Snails as large as a man crawl the canopy. Great glass worms slither on the ground beside the snails, breaking pieces of themselves away, each piece becoming the womb for another glass-bodied worm.

Pic 5 The Man is walking through the garden.

Pic 6 He bends down to pick something up. It is a hairless, rounded piece of flesh, eyeless, mouthless. In the distance above great moths loom, coloured like moonstone.

Pic 7 The man is walking in the ruins of a temple of bronze stone. On one wall he sees a face etched, massive, easily larger than him. In the distance, obelisks can be seen.

Pic 8 The man continues to search the empty world. He seems to be speaking to himself.

MAN: I'm reminded of a story. There was a place of salt. If one stepped into it they would become salt. Only ones immune were stone infants who died in the womb. Only became alive in those salt lands. Over time a race began, taken from remnants of their own mothers, creatures who had no identity or faces, yet. And then one day one of the children stepped out of the salt lands and came into a broad field of flowers. His touch turned flowers to white crystal but after a time flowers changed him. Eventually, others came, forgetting their origins, imagining they had always been this. But all they needed do to remember was look back, and if they did they would become pillars of salt. So, none of them ever looked back.

Pic 9 The man is standing before the ruins of what appears to be a long broken, massive ziggurat.

MAN: I'm home.

Page Two (Nine panels.)

Pic 1 The moths in the sky seem to slowly change. Outlines of more humanoid forms can be seen, ghostlike, coming through them, like they are tunnelling through evolution in the sky.

Pic 2 Small scorpions and flowering plants are placed in small terrariums and gardens, watched

over by this last man. He appears to be studying them, for some unknown reason.

Pic 3 The small rounded flesh of life, drop of life, is also examined in some machine. The images of it are shown in reverse from the moth people, showing that this was once, millions of years ago, human, all too human.

Pic 4 Small flocks of birds can be seen in the distance, jacuna birds. The man is walking along a marsh with the birds in the distance. He glances up at the sun.

Pic 5 The ruined ziggurats remain but the ghostly echoes of some future city can be seen. Some marvellous future place.

Pic 6 The Man has died, his body laid in the ground, which the reader can see through, showing his body lying there. Above him some scatterings of scorpions, some vines curling about, and moths dancing in the air.

Pic 7 Centuries are passing. Creatures are slowly changing. The trees are beginning to walk, scorpions are lengthening into more humanoid forms. Invertebrate deer can be seen.

MAN (v. o.): The moon dreamed, I suppose. Watching this menagerie below I suppose the moon dreamed, reflecting the thoughts of the beings below. The flowering trees bloated upward and expanded like the eyes of certain crustaceans rupturing in decay and there swam between trees the bodies of invertebrate deer, glass-skinned creatures of silver, eyeless, whose faces were like needles blunted.

Pic 8 More centuries. There are scarlet patches of vegetation, islands of black and red in seas of green. Scorpion women, vine women exist gathered about black trees.

MAN (v. o.): In that unwritten age I would not be seen or known, and whatever speech is theirs is nothing like my own. Their bodies shifted slowly, hands emerging, barbed tails becoming vestigial, others becoming thorn women, bodies blossoming into an echo of our form. But they will never know of us. No. They will never know.

Pic 9 several thousands of years into the future from the time the man came. About a massive black tree, scorpion women, vine women, birdlike green-feathered women and others gather. A seed is pulsing from the branches of a tree. They are all gathered about it, waiting for something to happen.

Page Three (Nine panels.)

Pic 1 The seed ruptures, and out a form can be seen, lying on the ground.

Pic 2 The people gather toward this figure but the reader cannot see it.

Pic 3 A shot of the jungle from on high.

MAN (v. o.): In the end, if one could call it an end, a woman stands in a garden of black trees and behind her is an amethyst scorpion woman, eyes yellow as the remaining sun. Do they love? Does the word even have meaning if those who first understood the word are gone?

Pic 4 The tree again, the form gathered among the people there.

MAN (v. o.): The tree before them flowers forth a child with fingers serpentine and eyes blue as the oceans which are not. There seems no hatred in either gaze and the woman stands before the other, her back exposed, both naked in their stances, neither armed.

Pic 5 Continuation.

MAN (v. o.): In the distance strange hymns are heard, neither human nor unhuman, neither harsh nor cruel nor kind. If there is an audience to the scene it is silent, revealing neither its existence nor its being. The only other witnesses are flowers amethyst or pale as moonstone or the colour of the eyes of owls.

Pic 6 The child can finally be seen. It is similar in appearance to the man, but also different.

MAN (v. o.): Perhaps the universe has only so much misery to endure. Perhaps one world's miseries are enough for it, or two, and when our miseries are ended only then a new world begins.

Pic 7 View of the jungle, the child walking among the scorpion women.

MAN (v. o.): In the distance, golden bodies are briefly seen, dragonflies with their sapphire eyes who skim the upper air and disappear, content, as if they were never really there.

Pic 8 The child is now amongst others like himself, taking on the faces of various human beings, distinctly human and yet alien in certain ways, similar and different to the scorpion women and others. Before them is a black pool and reflected on the opposite side of it images of men and women and a human city, and a blue sky.

MAN (v. o.): Stuck like pearls on a black wire the dying came. Temple, palace, and slum pulsed and reverberated the great heartbeat of creation, each soul the merest cell functioning unconsciously at the universe's will. Beautiful pearls of moments slung along the black wire of forever as the dying came While we cling as one clings to the shores after falling through the black skin of the sea, near drowning men all.

Pic 9 The jungle again. The child had grown now into the form of the man, though his skin was more like a scorpion's, more violet, and his eyes were yellow. The man seems to be staring at the

reader.

MAN (v. o.): I think that was a season for going mad.